

Catholic and Protestant faith communities in Thuringia after the Second World War, 1945-1948

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in History
in the University of Canterbury

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2007

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Abstract

In 1945, many parts of Germany lay in rubble and there was a Zeitgeist of exhaustion, apathy, frustration and, in places, shame. German society was disorientated and the Catholic and Protestant churches were the only surviving mass institutions that remained relatively independent from the former Nazi State. Allowed a general religious freedom by the occupying forces, the churches provided the German population with important spiritual and material support that established their vital post-war role in society. The churches enjoyed widespread popular support and, in October 1946, over 90 percent of the population in the Soviet zone (SBZ) claimed membership in either confession. This thesis is a social history that examines the position of the churches in Thuringia, as a case study, between 1945 and 1948 and aims to evaluate their social and moral influence on the population. It seeks to readdress the considerable dearth of historiographical attention given to the role of the churches in people's everyday lives. In summary, despite a general religious revival in 1945, the popularity of the churches was both short-lived and superficial. Although the churches were industrious in attempting to provide for everybody, the acute destitution encountered by the Thuringian population in 1945 was a chronic problem that undermined the authority of the churches. This was revealed in the inability of the churches to influence faith communities to regularly attend church, to welcome refugees and to feel some responsibility for the Nazi past. Meanwhile, by 1948, the dominant political party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), had tightened its control over social life in the SBZ. Instead of heeding the voice and dictates of the churches, the population fell into an ideological apathy that favoured the SED, despite the party's own widespread unpopularity. The result was the almost unchallenged, increasing power of socialism in the SBZ that ultimately led to the establishment of the German Democratic Republic under the aegis of the SED with the churches' acquiescence.

Acknowledgements

The submission of this dissertation closes a truly interesting chapter of my life. The vicissitudes of the past year have been both trying and rewarding. I feel compelled to acknowledge those individuals who made this project realisable where it otherwise would not have been.

Firstly, I am bound to thank my supervisors, Dr. Gareth Pritchard and Dr. Christopher Connolly, for their time and effort in sifting through some truly mediocre drivel during the writing process. Although my reactions to entirely justified criticisms have not always been welcoming, they have both taught me much not only about history and academic work but also about general work ethic and other life skills. Their advice has been invaluable and an indispensable resource that I shall, no doubt, continue to draw upon in coming years. Thank-you so very much.

I am also indebted to the help of all those who aided me before and during my five week research trip to Germany. I thank Education New Zealand and the University of Canterbury for their very generous funding without which the trip would have been but a chimera. In Germany, I wish to acknowledge especially the archivists. In particular, Dr. Friedrich Künzel at the *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin*, Dr. Manfred Agethen at the *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik*, Dr. Edgar Kutzner at the *Bistum Fulda Archiv*, Dr. Johannes Merz at the *Diözesan Archiv Würzburg*, Bettina Fischer at the *Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar* and Uta Schäfer at *Glaube und Heimat*. I owe special gratitude to Dr. Michael Matscha at the *Bistum Erfurt Archiv* and Hans-Günther Kessler at the *Landeskirchenarchiv in Eisenach*. Dr Matscha was an invaluable aid in helping with my inquiries and was moreover more than willing to offer information and advice on more practical issues such as the Erfurt transport system, supermarkets and internet cafés. Many, many thanks. Herr Kessler was similarly anxious to help and a mine of information. He tirelessly retrieved documents and, in a marathon effort, photocopied

important documents at my behest almost *ad infinitum*. For his informed tour and commentary on the astonishing history of Eisenach (which belies its small size) and advice on cuisine, moreover, I am indebted. Perhaps this gratefulness is balanced somewhat by Herr Kessler's cast-off remark that the Wartburg was 'just up the hill' from the archive. Plenty of effort and sweat later, I found myself gazing at the Wartburg, albeit from the wrong peak! Jests aside, I also cannot thank him enough. All of these people eased my burden and anxieties in what was my first, rather tentative trip out of Australasia.

I would also like to mention my peers and friends at Canterbury: Marcus, Fiona, Brian and Jacinta, and more recently, Jeremy and Rosemary. We have had some good times. I look forward to many more. Finally, the greatest gratitude I bear toward my parents, Peter and Cheryl, and siblings, Ruth and Timothy. Thank you for your close presence and role in my life in the past 15 months. Most especially, mum and dad, the support and the love you have shown me over 23 years is a debt I can never hope to repay. I shall miss you enormously in the next period of my life. *Ich wünsche euch alles Gute und liebe euch recht herzlich.*

Luke Fenwick
Christchurch
31/5/2007

List of abbreviations

ACDP – *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik*
BEA – *Bistum Erfurt Archiv*
BFA – *Bistum Fulda Archiv*
BAE-M – *Bischöfliches Amt Erfurt-Meiningen*
BdM – *Büro des Ministerpräsidenten*
BGVE – *Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Erfurt*
BGVF – *Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Fulda*
BGVP – *Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Paderborn*
GBVP bzw. Fulda – *Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Paderborn bzw. Fulda: Pfarreien, Dekanate, Stiftungen, Einrichtungen etc. auf dem Gebiet der Heutigen Diözese Erfurt*
BK – *Bekennende Kirche*
BKE – *Bischöfliches Kommissariat Erfurt*
BKM – *Bischöfliches Kommissariat Meiningen*
CDU – *Christlich-Demokratische Union*
DAW – *Diözesan Archiv Würzburg*
DC – *Deutsche Christen*
DWK – *Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission*
EKD – *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*
EZAB – *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin*
FDGB – *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*
FDJ – *Freie Deutsche Jugend*
GDR – *German Democratic Republic*
Gestapo – *Geheime Staatspolizei*
GuH – *Glaube und Heimat*
HJ – *Hitlerjugend*
KPD – *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*
JG – *Junge Gemeinde*
LfV – *Landesamt für Volksbildung*
LKAE – *Landeskirchenarchiv Eisenach*
LKR – *Landeskirchenrat der Thüringer evangelische Kirche*
LDPD – *Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*
NSDAP – *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*
RM – *Reichsmark*
SBZ – *Sowjetisches Besatzungszone*
SED – *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*
SMAD – *Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland*
SMATh – *Sowjetische Militäradministration in Thüringen*
SPD – *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
SS – *Schutzstaffel*
TeK – *Thüringer evangelische Kirche*
ThHStAW – *Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar*
VELKD – *Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Deutschland*

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on churchmen and their communities in the period April 1945 to the end of 1948. Using Thuringia as a case study, it evaluates the position and role of the Catholic and Protestant churches in the aftermath of the Second World War and their influence over the population. The churches enjoyed a prominent position in occupied Germany, for they were the only large-scale organisations that survived the collapse of the Nazi regime. Many regions lacked government and administration and the churches stepped into the breach and provided a focal point for the wider community. The churches therefore became the advocates for the people and enjoyed a degree of independence from the occupation authorities in Germany.¹

Many historians have commented on the fact that the churches in the western zones of occupation were allowed a large measure of autonomy by the French, British and American military administrations.² What is less well known is that the Russians, also,

¹ Hagen Findeis, Detlef Pollack (eds.), *Selbstbewahrung oder Selbstverlust. Bischöfe und Repräsentanten der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR über ihr Leben. 17 Interviews*, (Berlin: 1999), pp. 51-52; Martin Greschat, 'Die Kirchen in den beiden deutschen Staaten nach 1945', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 42/5, (1991), p. 267; Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, *Konfliktgemeinschaft Kirche: Aufsätze zur Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, (Göttingen: 2004), p. 301; Christoph Kleßmann, 'Protestantische Kirchen und nationale Identität im geteilten Deutschlands', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, 12/2, (1999), p. 447; Martin Greschat, 'Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung. Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', in: *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, eds. V. Conzemius, M. Greschat, H. Kocher, (Göttingen: 1988), p. 100; Thomas A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen. Eine Untersuchung zur kirchlichen Neuordnung in Thüringen 1945-1951*, (Stuttgart: 2003), p. 69; Clemens Vollnhals (ed.), *Entnazifizierung und Selbstreinigung im Urteil der evangelischen Kirche. Dokumente und Reflexionen 1945-1949*, (Hamburg: 1989), pp. 13-14; Martin Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', in: *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland (1945-1989/90)*, eds. C. Lepp, K. Nowak, (Göttingen: 2001), p. 11; Rudolf Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands (1945-1990)*, (Leipzig: 2005), p. 21; *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1945-1948*, ed. J. Beckmann, (Gütersloh: 1950), p. 1; Hermann Glaser, *1945. Beginn einer Zukunft: Bericht und Dokumentation*, (Frankfurt am Main: 2005), p. 330.

² In general see: Clemens Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', in: *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform, Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, eds. M. Broszat, K.-D. Henke, H. Woller, 3rd Ed. (Munich: 1990), pp. 113-116; Martin Greschat, 'Kontinuität und Neuanfang in der evangelischen Kirche in den ersten Jahren nach 1945', *Zeichen der Zeit*, 40, (1986), p. 86; Martin Greschat, 'Kirche und Öffentlichkeit in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit (1945-1949)', in: *Kirchen in der Nachkriegszeit. Vier zeitgeschichtliche Beiträge*, eds. A.

permitted the churches in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ) a remarkable level of independence. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly and most importantly, granting the churches a degree of genuine autonomy was part of the overall strategy of Russian *Deutschlandpolitik* (see further below, pp. 70-74). Secondly, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) recognised that the churches were able and willing to make a significant contribution to the pressing tasks of reconstruction. In particular, Moritz Mitzenheim, the post-war bishop of the Thuringian Evangelical Church (TeK), emphasised that the Protestant Church was willing to help through offering vital material and spiritual support to the population.³ There was the same readiness to aid in the Catholic Church.

In order to evaluate the position and social influence of the churches in occupied Thuringia, we shall explore three areas of inquiry. Firstly, why did the occupation authorities in Thuringia permit the churches so much autonomy, and how effectively did the churches use their freedom of manoeuvre to provide material and spiritual care to their faithful? The churches' position from 1945, upheld by the Soviet occupiers, was based on mass popular support. In fact, 93.2 percent of Thuringians were church members in October 1946. As a result of their freedom of movement, the churches were key players in post-war German society and they sought, above all, to maintain the piety

Boyens, M. Greschat, R. von Thadden, (Göttingen: 1979), pp. 106-107; Karl Herbert, *Kirche zwischen Aufbruch und Tradition. Entscheidungsjahre nach 1945*, (Stuttgart: 1989), pp. 14-15; Erwin Gatz, 'Entwicklungslinien nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', in: *Kirche und Katholizismus, Band I: Mittel-, West- und Nordeuropa*, ed. E. Gatz, (Paderborn: 1998), p. 60; M. Greschat, 'Die Kirchen in den beiden deutschen Staaten nach 1945', p. 267; Heinz Hürten, 'Zum Verhältnis von Katholiken und Protestanten im geteilten Deutschland – die katholische Perspektive', in: *Zwei Staaten – zwei Kirchen? Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland. Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung*, eds. J. Mehlhausen, L. Siegele-Wenschkewitz, (Leipzig: 2000), p. 137; Konrad Repgen, 'Die Erfahrung des Dritten Reiches und das Selbstverständnis der deutschen Katholiken nach 1945', in: *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, p. 131; Adolf M. Birke, 'Katholische Kirche und Politik in der Phase des Neubeginns 1945-1949', in: *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, pp. 180-181; H. Glaser, *1945. Beginn einer Zukunft...*, pp. 324-325.

³ Thomas Björkman (ed.), *Ein Lebensraum für die Kirche. Die Rundbriefe von Landesbischof D. Mitzenheim 1945-1970*, (Lund: 1991), pp. 23, 29; Clemens Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch. Berichte ausländischer Beobachter aus dem Jahre 1945*, (Göttingen: 1988), pp. 11, 14-15; M. Greschat, 'Die Kirchen in den beiden deutschen Staaten nach 1945', p. 267; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, pp. 28-29; Marilyn Thomas, 'The evangelical church in the German Democratic Republic', in: *The Workers' and Peasants' State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71*, eds. P. Major, J. Osmond, (Manchester: 2002), p. 212.

of the population through material and spiritual aid. The fundamental importance of the churches to the community at large was in this service.

Secondly, how much influence did the churches have over the attitudes and behaviour of the nine in ten Thuringians who were church members? According to many historians, the churches in the immediate post-war period enjoyed an unprecedented degree of prestige and moral authority.⁴ In order to ascertain whether the churches really did possess as much popular influence as the secondary literature would have us believe, we shall look in detail at church attendance between 1945 and 1948 and also the attitudes of native Thuringians to the hundreds of thousands of refugees who flooded into the region. In particular, the churches encouraged parishioners to attend services and they put a huge amount of effort into trying to persuade Thuringians to embrace their new neighbours and co-religionists, but did faith communities heed the blandishments of their clergy? If the churches were unable to influence the behaviour of the laity on issues that the churches themselves regarded as of central importance, the implication is that the moral authority of the churches had definite limits.

The final area of investigation pertains to the relationship of the churches, and in particular the TeK, to the Nazi past. Denazification was a major concern of all the occupying powers in Germany, but the most far-reaching purge was carried out by the Soviets.⁵ Despite this, the churches in the SBZ, like the churches in the western zones, were largely permitted to denazify themselves. How, then, was denazification carried out by the churches in Thuringia and why was the process not comprehensive? Why also did the churches, and the wider Christian community, refuse to accept any significant degree of 'collective guilt' for the crimes of the Nazis? This analysis will, once more, reveal much about the position of the churches from 1945 by exploring their relationship to the secular authorities in Thuringia. As the churches attempted to bring the wider population

⁴ See notes one and two above.

⁵ Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany since 1945*, (Oxford: 1997), pp. 18-19; Helga A. Welsh, "Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung" und politische Säuberung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands', in: *Politische Säuberung in Europa, die Abrechnung mit Faschismus und Kollaboration nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. K-D. Henke, H. Woller, (Munich: 1996), pp. 86, 103.

to repentance for the Nazi past, it will also show to what extent the churches were able to influence people's everyday attitudes.

Given the prominence of the churches in post-war Germany, it is remarkable how little has been written about them. Historians have published innumerable books and articles on the diplomacy, politics, culture and administration of occupied Germany.⁶ There is an equally voluminous literature on the history of the churches *before* 1945.⁷ On the basis of numerous memoirs, reports, oral histories and other published sources, historians have reconstructed the *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) of the churches in Nazi Germany in considerable detail.⁸ Yet, the history – and in particular *Alltagsgeschichte* – of the churches in the years after 1945 has been neglected. Even the opening of the East German archives after 1989, which has catalysed an expanding body of literature on the occupation, has led to comparatively few publications on the churches in the SBZ. The focus of the studies that have been written is largely on administrative history and the high politics of the churches. In fact, there is no text – that I have discovered at least – in German, English or French which develops an in-depth socio-religious history of communities in the Soviet zone, much less Thuringia. There are studies of various aspects of religious communities, such as Wolfgang Tischner's *Katholische Kirche in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1951*, Birgit Mitzscherlich's *Diktatur und Diaspora...* (on the Meissen diocese) and Thomas Seidel's Thuringian study *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, but they give little attention to the everyday religious life of clergy and their communities.⁹ For example, Thomas Seidel's publications, and Jürgen Seidel's also, focus predominantly on

⁶ For example: David Pike, *The politics of culture in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949*, (Stanford: 1992); Toby Thacker, *The end of the Third Reich: defeat, denazification & Nuremburg January 1944-November 1946*, (Stroud: 2006); Volker Koop, *Besetzt: Französische Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland*, (Berlin: 2005); also see: Barbara Dotts Paul, *The Germans after World War II: an English-language bibliography*, (Boston: 1990).

⁷ See, for example: Michael Ruck, *Bibliographie zum Nationalsozialismus*, (Cologne: 1995).

⁸ Perhaps the most prominent examples of *Alltagsgeschichte* are the six volumes of Martin Broszat's magisterial 'Bavaria Project' (*Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, six volumes, ed. M. Broszat, [Munich, Vienna: Oldenbourg, c. 1977]), which to a large degree inaugurated *Alltagsgeschichte* as a fruitful area of research into the Third Reich.

⁹ Wolfgang Tischner, *Katholische Kirche in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1951. Die Formierung einer Subgesellschaft im entstehenden sozialistischen Staat*, (Paderborn: 2001); Birgit Mitzscherlich, *Diktatur und Diaspora. Das Bistum Meißen 1932-1951*, (Paderborn: 2005).

the political history of the clerical administration and the vicissitudes of denazification in the church hierarchy.¹⁰ Little space is afforded social history. If the German language literature on the churches is thin, the English language literature is downright skeletal. In Norman Naimark's seminal study and otherwise comprehensive study of the SBZ, *The Russians in Germany*, the churches are almost invisible.¹¹ Mark Allinson's *Politics and popular opinion in East Germany 1945-68* does deal with the churches (in Thuringia moreover), but the analysis is largely restricted to conflict between Church and State in the later German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1949.¹² The form of social history attempted here, that of religious communities and their clergy, as well as church authorities, will advance our understanding of the Soviet zone.

Historical context

The historical context is essential to an understanding of the position of the churches after the Second World War. Most importantly, the context shows what people in individual communities encountered with the collapse of the Nazi regime and foreign invasion. These experiences often conditioned people's attitudes and behaviour in the post-war period.

Over a month before the official surrender of the Wehrmacht on 7/8 May 1945, central Germany, in particular the greater Thuringian, Western Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt areas, was overrun by American troops.¹³ In order to split the German front in two, General

¹⁰ Most prominently, for example: J. Jürgen Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945. Personeller Wiederaufbau und Entnazifizierung in der evangelischen Kirche der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands. Einführung und Dokumente*, (Göttingen: 1996); Thomas A. Seidel, *Übergang der Diktaturen....* See n. 1 above for full citation.

¹¹ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, (Cambridge [Mass.]: 1995).

¹² Mark Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, (Manchester: 2000).

¹³ See, in general, on the end of the war: Manfred Overesch, *Deutschland 1945-1949*, (Königstein/Ts.: 1979), pp. 40-46. On the military taking of Thuringia and environs see: Earl Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany 1944-1946*, (Washington D.C.: 1975), p. 228ff; Eduard Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld und im Raum Mühlhausen vom 3. bis 10. April 1945*, (Bad Langensalza: 2002); Eduard Fritze, *Struth am 7. April 1945 – die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld*, (Witzenhausen: 1995); T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen....*, pp. 60-67; T. A. Seidel, 'Befreiung oder Besatzung? Das

Dwight D. Eisenhower had ordered an offensive on central Germany from early March. The Third Army under General George S. Patton was instructed to secure the area around Gotha, Erfurt and Weimar. Weimar was the key strategic goal due to its political, administrative and military importance as the headquarters of the Thuringian Defence Commissar, Fritz Sauckel.¹⁴

On 1 April, the Fourth American Tank Division entered Thuringia over the Werra river at Creuzburg. American troops entered Eisenach on 6 April 1945 after sporadic opposition. Wehrmacht units were not able to stall the American advance toward Jena, let alone achieve tactical superiority.¹⁵ German military resistance, in fact, was often undermined by civilians who emphasised its futility to demoralised troops. The irregular *Volkssturm*, which comprised the bulk of the forces put into the field to defend Thuringia, consisted of half-hearted ‘lunatics, children, cripples, geriatrics [and] the military unfit’.¹⁶ By 16 April 1945, the whole of Thuringia was under American control. For Thuringia, Nazi government was at an end, yet life went on for the survivors.

Kriegsende in Thüringen’, *Palmbaum*, 3/1, (1995), pp. 32-42; Jens Fügner, ‘Amerikanisches Intermezzo. Jena zwischen Drittem Reich und Sowjetischer Besatzungszone (April bis Juli 1945)’, in: *Macht und Milieu. Jena zwischen Kriegsende und Mauerbau*, ed. R. Stutz, (Jena: 2000), pp. 30-31; Joachim Bornschein, *Raketenschmieden und KZ-Außenkommandos im Eichsfeld und Südharz 1944-1945*, (Weimar: 2003); Hans Patze, Walter Schlesinger (eds.), *Geschichte Thüringens. Band 5, Teil 2: Politische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, (Köln: 1978), pp. 559-563; cf. socialist historiography on the American taking and occupation of Thuringia: Ludwig Fuchs, ‘Die Besatzung Thüringens durch die amerikanischen Truppen. Die Behinderung des Kampfes der KPD um die Neuformierung ihrer Reihen und um die Entwicklung einer breiten antifascistischen Bewegung zur Herstellung antifascistisch-demokratischer Verhältnisse (April-Juli 1945)’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte Thüringens*, (1968), pp. 53-111, esp. 54-58; Robert Büchner, Hannelore Freundlich, ‘Zur Situation in den zeitweilig englisch oder amerikanisch besetzten Gebieten der sowjetischen Besatzungszone (April bis Anfang Juli 1945)’, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 14, (1972), pp. 992-1006.

¹⁴ T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65; *Kriegsende und Neubeginn im Landkreis Eichsfeld 1945/1946. Eine zeitgenössische Dokumentation*, T. T. Müller, M. Pinkert (eds.) (Heiligenstadt: 2003), p. 28.

¹⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 28; also see reports from: Arenshausen/Hohengandern, pp. 62, 65, Bodenrode, p. 119, Brehme, p. 123, Kalteneber, p. 246, Weißenborn-Lüderode, pp. 335-336, Leinefelde, p. 274, Wüstheuterode, pp. 364-365.

At the cessation of hostilities in early May 1945, large areas of Germany lay in ruins.¹⁷ Most major cities had been decimated by repeated aerial bombings and many rural areas were isolated and left to their own devices.¹⁸ Food and other critical supplies were limited, economic chaos promoted a thriving black market and approximately four million Displaced Persons (mostly foreign forced labour) were on the loose.¹⁹ In addition, vast numbers of refugees (eventually around twelve million) flooded into what remained of Germany from territories that had been annexed by the Russians and the Poles.²⁰ Mostly expelled from their homes, the refugees were only able to carry their most coveted belongings and they were largely reliant on aid. The need of refugees, and also native Germans, was great and the situation was catastrophic in places.²¹ One eyewitness noted:

¹⁷ In general, see, for example: Rolf Steininger (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1961, Darstellung und Dokumente in zwei Bänden, Band I*, (Frankfurt: 1987), pp. 87-97; M. Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', pp. 48-49; Wolfgang Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR. Gemeinden in der Bewährung 1945-1980*, 2nd Edtn, (Mainz: 1980), pp. 11-14.

¹⁸ In Thuringia: Herbert Hömig, 'Thüringen unter dem Nationalsozialismus', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 18ff; Hermann Kreuzer, 'Die Besetzung Saalfelds durch die Amerikaner 1945: Kommunal- und Regionalverwaltung in der "Stunde Null"', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 28.

¹⁹ Herbert Lilge, *Deutschland 1945-1963, Zeitgeschichte in Texten und Quellen*, (Hannover: 1979), p. 3; See for widespread conditions in general: Thilo Koch, Hans Hubmann et al, *So fing es an. Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1945-1949*, (Braunschweig: 1988), pp. 5-13; on the lack of food see: Gabriele Stüber, 'Der Kampf ums Überleben. Die Ernährungssituation der ersten Nachkriegsjahre', in: *Die Kapitulation von 1945 und der Neubeginn in Deutschland*, ed. W. Becker, (Cologne: 1987), pp. 97-125; H. Glaser, *1945. Beginn einer Zukunft*, p. 127ff.

²⁰ H. Lilge, p. 3; Peter Bucher (ed.), *Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945-1949*, (Darmstadt: 1990), p. 367; J. Jürgen Seidel, 'Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands in den Nachkriegsmonaten des Jahres 1945', *Chronik*, 13/8, (1985), p. 26; *Kirchliches Handbuch: amtliches statistisches Jahrbuch der katholischen Kirche Deutschlands, Band XXIII, 1944-51*, ed. F. Groner, (Cologne: 1951), p. 206; Günter Böddeker, *Die Flüchtlinge: die Vertreibung der Deutschen im Osten*, (Munich: 1985), p. 357; Beate Andrees, 'Auf der Flucht in ein neues Leben. Flüchtlinge, Vertriebene und Umsiedler 1945 in Thüringen', in: *Zeitbrüche – Lebensbrüche. Frauenalltag in Thüringen 1945*, ed. M. Moritz, (Erfurt: 1995), p. 106; W. Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, pp. 14-17; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 68.

²¹ Günther Niemczik, *Menschen auf dem Wege. Eine Chronik der Caritasarbeit in Thüringen*, (Erfurt: 1996), p. 31; Heinz Siebert, *Das Eichsfeld unter dem Sowjetstern*, ed. B. Opfermann, (Duderstadt: 1992), p. 64ff; Friedemann Behr, *Mein Jahr 1945*, (Berlin: 1988), p. 64; G. Böddeker, p. 354ff; also at Duderstadt: Hans-Heinrich Eberling (ed.), *Duderstadt 1945-1949. Kriegsende und Neubeginn. Ein Quellen- und Lesebuch*, (Duderstadt: 1997), pp. 76-96; in general see: *KJ*, 1945-1948, pp. 108-109; P. Bucher (ed.), pp. 367-377; Hartmut Rudolph, *Evangelische Kirche und Vertriebene 1945 bis 1972. Band I: Kirchen ohne Land...*, (Göttingen: 1984); M. Overesch, *Deutschland 1945-1949*, pp. 94-100; Thomas A. Seidel, 'Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen. Eine mitteldeutsche Landeskirche im Spannungsfeld von Besatzungsmacht und deutscher Verwaltung 1945-1949', *Herbergen der Christenheit. Jahrbuch für*

At zero hour [Stunde Null] Germany was a political and economic, a spiritual and moral, pile of rubble. The ability of man today to imagine the entire extent of the misery is barely sufficient. The survivors stood before an abyss.²²

The material damage to Thuringian towns varied depending on the intensity of Wehrmacht resistance to the Americans.²³ For example, there was heavy fighting around Struth on 6 and 7 April due to a German counter-attack and the ensuing American victory left the town in ruins.²⁴ At Asbach, the priest, Wilhelm Happel, reported that six houses were damaged as well as some industrial buildings, the school and the local church.²⁵ Most towns and rural villages in Thuringia and especially Eichsfeld, however, were largely unscathed.²⁶ Berntarode, for instance, suffered damage only to a barn and two houses.²⁷

Although Thuringia suffered much less than other parts of the Soviet zone, the impact of military defeat was calamitous.²⁸ The apparatus of local government had disintegrated

deutsche Kirchengeschichte, 20, (1996), p. 89; Wolfgang Knauff, 'Die Katholische Kirche in der DDR 1945-1976', *Stimmen der Zeit*, 195, (1977), p. 86-104, p. 87;

²² Aloys Schaefer, *Lebensbericht. Landrat im Eichsfeld. Zeuge der Besatzungszeit*, (Heiligenstadt: 1993), p. 46.

²³ On the considerable destruction and loss of life at Jena from aerial bombing see: J. Fügner, pp. 33-34; Thomas A. Seidel, 'Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse. Die evangelische Kirchgemeinde Jena nach 1945', in: *Macht und Milieu. Jena zwischen Kriegsende und Mauerbau*, ed. R. Stutz, (Jena: 2000), p. 111; H. Hömig, 'Thüringen unter dem Nationalsozialismus', pp. 25-26.

²⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Kefferhausen, p. 256, Struth, pp. 317-318; see further on Struth: E. Fritze, *Struth am 7. April 1945...*, esp. pp. 18-27, 30-32; E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, pp. 47-97, 133-138, 147-159; Maria Kramann, *Die Entwicklung des Gesundheitswesens auf dem Eichsfeld in den letzten vier Jahrhunderten*, (Heiligenstadt: 1966), pp. 290-292.

²⁵ H. Siebert, pp. 20-23, on costs see: pp. 27, 116; Rolf Barthel, Martin Fischer, *Major M.B. Dsilichow, erster sowjetischer Kommandant des Kreises Eichsfeld 1945/1946*, (Heiligenstadt: 1984), pp. 7-9; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 28, Asbach, p. 104, Berntarode, p. 107.

²⁶ *Inter alia: Kriegsende...*, Beuren, p. 111, Birkungen, p. 118, Bischofferode, p. 118-119, Bodenrode, p. 119; on the other hand, see: Kefferhausen, pp. 252-255, 257-259; Leinefelde, p. 271; see also: A. Schaefer, p. 47; W. Tischner, p. 65.

²⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Berntarode/Heiligenstadt p. 108, also: Berntarode/Worbis, p. 109, Beuren, p. 110.

²⁸ *GuH*, 1/34, 15/12/46, 'An die Heimkehrer in den Gemeinden der TeK', p. 3; B. Andrees, p. 103; Helga A. Welsh, 'Thüringen', in: *SBZ-Handbuch. Staatlich Verwaltungen, Parteien, gesellschaftliche Organisationen und ihre Führungskräfte in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945-1949*,

and transport and communications systems were almost non-existent. Economic activity had come to a standstill and the state ceased to function.²⁹ In the words of one report about the situation in Eichsfeld: 'Hitler's total war ended in complete defeat and with complete chaos.'³⁰ According to Moritz Mitzenheim:

Everywhere [there was] a pile of rubble, no transport possibilities, no postal connections, no organised administration, everywhere [there was] a lack of vital necessities. In terms of the Church: half of the community [was] without pastors, [and there was] no money in order to pay salaries and to perform the most necessary services. [There was] also confusion in internal church life: church buildings [were] considerably damaged by the effects of war [and] pastors' residences [were] in disrepair as a result of a lack of materials and manpower.³¹

The tumult and material poverty of Thuringia continued for years after the end of the war. As late as mid-1947, Mitzenheim noted that the malnutrition and deprivation would inevitably last into the foreseeable future.³² By 1948, the effects of a stuttering economy ensured that widespread poverty and hunger would endure.³³ It was in this impoverished environment that the churches were operating, and it is against this background that their activities must be understood.

Thuringia and the churches

The importance of religion to German and Thuringian history in general is significant. Elisabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231) is widely considered as the German 'national saint' of the Middle Ages, and she was canonised in 1235 for her selfless care of the sick and

eds. M. Broszat, H. Weber, (Munich: 1990), p. 168; T. A. Seidel, 'Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen...', p. 89; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 67-68; H. Patze, W. Schlesinger (eds.), p. 563; H. Kreutzer, pp. 31-35.

²⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 30; Dietzenrode cut off from Heiligenstadt, p. 150.

³⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 30.

³¹ Moritz Mitzenheim, *50 Jahre im Dienste der Kirche. Festgabe zum Gold. Ordinationsjubiläum (18.10.1964)*, ed. Ingo Braecklein, (Berlin: 1964), p. 91.

³² T. Björkman (ed.), p. 29.

³³ See: *GuH*, 3/32, 8/8/48, 'Wie wir als Christen schuldig sind, einander beim Sterben zu helfen', p. 1.

poor.³⁴ Martin Luther (1483-1546) also was of course a German and Germany was the birthplace of the Reformation. Throughout the Reformation period and up to the nineteenth century, the principalities and small states that would eventually constitute Germany in 1871 considered themselves Christian, whether Catholic or Protestant in confession. As for Thuringia, it holds a special claim to the achievements of Luther. Luther's mother was from Eisenach and he went to school there. Luther also, famously, as *Junker Jörg*, translated the New Testament into the German vernacular in 1521-1522 at the Wartburg, the castle of Frederick III which presides over Eisenach and is today a national monument. The importance of Luther to the immediate post-war period in Thuringia was significant, and his legacy was fundamental to the direction of the TeK after 1945.³⁵ Rather than proclaiming a radical new beginning, the church authorities stressed Lutheran continuity.³⁶ As to the prominence of religion at the community level, local churches command the skyline in almost every small village or town. This is particularly evident from the *Deutsche Bahn* between Eisenach, Erfurt, Jena, Weimar, Berlin, Fulda, Würzburg and Frankfurt.

If the history of Christianity in Thuringia is long and deep, the history of the State of Thuringia itself is relatively short. The State was formed in May 1920 from the small principalities of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, Sachsen-Meiningen, Gotha, Sachsen-Altenburg, Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt and Reuss (see Map I, p. 190). After the redrawing of Thuringia's boundaries in 1945, it encompassed 15,598 square kilometres and was therefore the smallest political area (Land) in the SBZ (see Map II, p. 191).³⁷ Economically, Thuringia was largely agricultural but studded with a number of industrial towns. It was also a stronghold of the workers' movement: the first

³⁴ Ernst Koch, 'Thüringen', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 33, (2001), pp. 504-505.

³⁵ See, for example: M. Mitzenheim, *50 Jahre im Dienste der Kirche...*, pp. 92-93; also *GuH*, 1/23 (1946).

³⁶ Martin Greschat, 'Weder Neuanfang noch Restauration. Zur Interpretation der deutschen evangelischen Kirchengeschichte nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', in: *Das Unrechtsregime. Bd. 2: Verfolgung – Exil – Belasteter Neubeginn*, ed. U. Büttner, (Hamburg: 1986), pp. 337-341.

³⁷ H. A. Welsh, 'Thüringen', p. 168; Herbert Hömig, 'Geschichte', in: *Thüringen. Historische Landeskunde Mitteldeutschlands*, ed. H. Heckmann, (Würzburg: 1982), pp. 31-32; Oliver Lemuth, 'Thüringen und "Mitteldeutschland"', in: *Mitteldeutschland. Begriff – Geschichte – Konstrukt*, ed. J. John, (Rudolstadt: 2001), pp. 393-398; H. Patze, W. Schlesinger (eds.), pp. 363ff, 437-439.

Marxist party in Germany, the ‘Social Democratic Workers’ Party’, was founded in 1869 in Eisenach while at the conference of Gotha in 1875 it merged with the ‘General Union of German Workers’ to form what became the later Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).³⁸ In terms of confession, Thuringia was, with the exceptions of Eichsfeld and Geisa, a predominantly Protestant region.³⁹

Of the 17.3 million people who lived in the SBZ in 1946, 14.1 million (81.6 percent) belonged to the Protestant Church, whilst 2.1 (12.2 percent) were members of the Catholic Church.⁴⁰ 93.8 percent of the total population in the Soviet zone were therefore members of the two major Christian confessions. Of the 1,713,849 people who lived in the area of the TeK in 1946, 1,493,291 (87.2 percent) were officially members of the Protestant Church.⁴¹ The membership of the Catholic Church in the Thuringian section of the Fulda Diocese in 1946 was 397,400.⁴² Within the administration boundaries of the State of Thuringia in October 1946, 76.5 percent of the 2,927,497 inhabitants belonged to the Evangelical Church and 16.7 percent belonged to the Catholic Church.⁴³

The Catholic and Protestant authorities in 1945 demarcated and administered Thuringia differently (see Maps III-VI, pp. 192-195). In this study, ‘Thuringia’ is understood according to the demarcation of the TeK – which largely corresponded to the area of the Thuringian State defined in 1920 – and the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese with the Meiningen Commissariat in addition.

³⁸ Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR, 1945-53*, (Manchester: 2000), pp. 4-5.

³⁹ Erich Stegmann, *Der Kirchenkampf in der Thüringer evangelischen Kirche 1933-1945. Ein Kapitel Thüringer Kirchengeschichte*, (Berlin: 1984), p. 102.

⁴⁰ Horst Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, in: *SBZ-Handbuch*, p. 1072.

⁴¹ *LKAE*, A 930, Band I; see also: Christine Koch, *Die Junge Gemeinde der evangelischen Landeskirchen in Sachsen und Thüringen 1945-1953. Dargestellt unter der besonderen Berücksichtigung des Konfliktes zwischen Staat und kirchlicher Jugendarbeit*, (Regensburg: 2000), pp. 240-241.

⁴² H. Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, p. 849.

⁴³ *KH*, 1944-51, p. 236; cf. 76.6% in Helga A. Welsh, ‘Thüringen’, p. 168; 1,678,260 Protestants in 1948: H. Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, p. 843.

Catholic jurisdiction in Thuringia was not unified and the area was shared by the Würzburg, Meissen and Fulda dioceses.⁴⁴ The geographical scope of this thesis encompasses the *Bischöfliche Amt Erfurt-Meiningen* (established in 1973) which comprised the Commissariat of Meiningen in southern Thuringia and the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese in 1945.⁴⁵ The small area of Gera in eastern Thuringia was administered by the diocese of Meissen, but it is not treated here. Meiningen was under the jurisdiction of the Würzburg diocese and, while the episcopal seat was in the American zone, Meiningen was in the Russian zone.⁴⁶ The Fulda diocese administered much of Thuringia, yet, like Würzburg, was cut off from its eastern areas by the zonal frontiers. The city of Fulda was in the American zone while Thuringia, including the predominantly Catholic region of Eichsfeld, was in the Russian zone. The creation of the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese, the area located within the SBZ, was necessary for administration purposes and it constituted the areas of Obereichsfeld and a large swath of the political area of Thuringia.⁴⁷

The Provost of Erfurt, Joseph Freusberg, was promoted to the post of *Generalvikar* in 1946 – thus allowing him virtual autonomy – in order to ease management and pastoral difficulties imposed by the zonal boundaries.⁴⁸ In July 1945, the district of Eichsfeld was created with the administration seat at Heiligenstadt. The oversight of this district was entrusted to the *Bischöflicher Kommissarius*, Josef Streb, who was subordinate to Freusberg but enjoyed a large degree of independence from both Erfurt and Fulda. Streb

⁴⁴ KH, 1944-51, p. 24; see also: H. Dähn, 'Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften', pp. 818, 824; W. Tischner, pp. 49-50; W... Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁵ Erwin Gatz, *Die Bischöfe der deutschsprachigen Länder, 1945-2001. Ein biografisches Lexikon*, (Berlin: 2002), p. 174; Bernhard Opfermann, *Das bischöfliche Amt Erfurt-Meiningen und seine Diaspora: Geschichte und Gegenwart: ein Handbuch*, (Leipzig: 1988), p. 3ff.

⁴⁶ In general: W. Tischner, p. 52.

⁴⁷ See: H. Siebert, pp. 11-13; Bernhard Opfermann, *Die kirchliche Verwaltung des Eichfeldes in seiner Vergangenheit*. (Leipzig: 1958), pp. 13-14.

⁴⁸ E. Gatz, *Die Bischöfe der deutschsprachigen Länder*, p. 175; W. Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, p. 15; E. Koch, 'Thüringen', p. 510.

was appointed as successor to Adolf Bolte who was made *Weihbischof* of Fulda on 4 June 1945.⁴⁹

With the dissolution of the State Protestant Church of Germany in 1918, the individual churches of the small Thuringian principalities combined to form the TeK on 5 December 1919.⁵⁰ There were, however, diverse confessional and theological emphases amongst each of the regional churches and these differences were reflected in compromises in the TeK constitution of 10 October 1923. The ambiguities inherent to the constitution tolerated many movements within the church; one of these was the future German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*).⁵¹ In 1945, a church council, led by one man, oversaw the administration of the TeK. In the post-war period, this leader was *Landesoberpfarrer*, and later *Landesbischof*, Moritz Mitzenheim. The administration area of the TeK was split into twelve superintendentures encompassing the districts of Apolda, Arnstadt, Eisenach, Gotha, Sondershausen, Weimar and part of the Sömmerda district.⁵² The major administrative centres were located at Gotha, Weimar and Eisenach, while the supervision of the district of Erfurt was shared with the evangelical churches of Saxony and Hannover.⁵³

The post-war TeK can only be fully understood and appreciated in relation to the history of the Church during the period of Nazi Government and its administrative measures between 1945 and 1948. Under National Socialism, there was a ‘Church struggle’ (*Kirchenkampf*) in the German Protestant Church between the German Christian

⁴⁹ H. Siebert, pp. 29-31.

⁵⁰ In general: E. Koch, ‘Thüringen’, p. 510ff; Birgit Heuser, ‘Kirchen, Freikirchen, Sekten’, in: *Thüringen. Historische Landeskunde Mitteldeutschlands*, pp. 140-141; D. Rudolf Hermann, *Thüringische Kirchengeschichte. Band II*, (Waltrop: Spenner, [2000]), pp. 598-603; E. Stegmann, pp. 9-11; Thomas A. Seidel, ‘Im Wechsel der Systeme. Anmerkungen zur evangelischen Landeskirche Thüringens 1919 bis 1989’, in: *Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche im Nationalen. Regionalstudien zu Protestantismus, Nationalsozialismus und Nachkriegsgeschichte 1930 bis 2000*, eds. W. Krogel, M. Gailus, (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 2006), pp. 331-332; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 34ff.

⁵¹ J. Jürgen Seidel, ‘Abkehr vom “Deutschen Christentum”’, Die “Thüringer evangelische Kirche” im Jahre 1945’, *Kirche im Sozialismus*, 6, (1983), p. 39; Gabriele Lautenschläger, ‘Der Kirchenkampf in Thüringen’, in: *Nationalsozialismus in Thüringen*, eds. D. Heiden, G. Mai, (Weimar: 1995), p. 464.

⁵² C. Koch, p. 241; cf. T. Björkman (ed.), p. 20.

⁵³ C. Koch, p. 241.

movement and the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche).⁵⁴ In general, the German Christians assimilated aspects of Christian thought with Nazi political and racial ideas in an attempt to align the Church with the secular state.⁵⁵ The Thuringian German Christians were especially radical. In particular:

The goal of the Thuringian German Christians was from the outset a co-ordination [Gleichschaltung] of the Evangelical Church with the National Socialist State, [and] the regaining of the de-churched masses through Nazi-style proclamations with the help of state power supposedly standing in the loft of positive Christianity... The long-term goal was the overcoming of various Christian confessions through the creation of a German national church: one people, one state, one church!⁵⁶

The opponents of the German Christians coalesced into the Confessing Church, which refused to compromise Christian doctrine in order to coordinate Church and State. Adherents of the Confessing Church opposed the attempted imposition of Nazi ideas into the Christian Church and not the overarching worldview of the National Socialist State *per se*.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Clemens Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung, 1945-1949: Der Last der Nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit*, (München: 1989), pp. 22-27; J. J. Seidel, 'Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...', p. 26; also: Rainer Lächele, 'Religionsfreiheit und Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Die Deutschen Christen und die Besatzungsmächte nach 1945', *Evangelische Theologie*, 51/2, (1991), pp. 131-154; C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', pp. 116-118; Kurt Meier, *Der evangelischen Kirchenkampf, Band 3: Im Zeichen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, (Göttingen: 1984), pp. 474-494; German Christians in Thuringia: E Stegmann, *Der Kirchenkampf in der Thüringer evangelischen Kirche...*; T. A. Seidel, 'Im Wechsel der Systeme', pp. 335-338; G. Lautenschläger, pp. 485-486; E. Koch, 'Thüringen', pp. 511-513.

⁵⁵ R. Lächele, p. 132; see, for the most in depth outline and analysis of German Christian theology: Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die politische Theologie der Deutsche Christen. Einheit und Vielfalt deutsch-christlichen Denkens, dargestellt anhand des Bundes für deutsche Kirche, der Thüringer Kirchenbewegung 'Deutsche Christen' und der Christlich-deutschen Bewegung*, (Göttingen: 1982), for Thuringian German Christians especially pp. 56-100.

⁵⁶ *LKAE*, A 776, 81, Oberkirchenrat Lempp to Württ. Kultministerium, 19/2/46; cf. *LKAE*, A 776, 107, 'The Rebirth of the German Church – Wiedergeburt der deutschen Kirche', Stewart Herman, 15/7/47.

⁵⁷ G. Lautenschläger, pp. 485-486.

The Church struggle was particularly vitriolic in the TeK.⁵⁸ According to one pastor: ‘We saw in the German Christians not our personal opponents, not brothers in error, but rather – for the sake of Christ – our deadly enemy!’⁵⁹ Thuringia was a bastion of the German Christian movement both in terms of radicalism and numbers. Thuringian German Christians, for instance, were required to profess Nazism out of a sense of ‘Christian responsibility’.⁶⁰ When the American conquest of Thuringia was complete in mid-April 1945, only a minority of pastors in office belonged to the Confessing Church.⁶¹ Most were either active German Christians or neutrals. Under occupation, there were few spontaneous denazification measures and even the German Christian bishop, Hugo Rönck, remained in office during the early weeks of American occupation.⁶² During this period, Mitzenheim, as the recognised leader of the small Confessing Church faction in the TeK, failed to negotiate a handover of the Church.⁶³ Negotiations stalled until the Americans imprisoned Rönck on 30 April 1945.⁶⁴ Thereafter, the TeK vice-president, Dr. Erwin Brauer, on 2 May empowered Mitzenheim to assume overall church leadership

⁵⁸ See: Ernst Koch, ‘Thüringer Wege im “Dritten Reich”, Aktionsschwierigkeiten in Landeskirchenrat, Landesregierung und deutschchristlicher Bewegung nach 1933’, in: *Thüringer Gratwanderungen, Beiträge zur fünfundsiebzigjährigen Geschichte der evangelischen Landeskirche Thüringens*, eds. T. A. Seidel, D. Wiegand, (Leipzig: 1998), pp. 80-93; G. Lautenschläger, pp. 463-486; K. Meier, pp. 474-494; At Jena: T. A. Seidel, ‘Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse...’, pp. 103-111.

⁵⁹ *LKAE*, A 776, 108, Pf. Keller to Pf. Krauss, 3/3/46.

⁶⁰ H.-J. Sonne, p. 56.

⁶¹ J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, p. 424.

⁶² See, in general, for the course of events: J. J. Seidel, ‘Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...’, pp. 25-48; J. J. Seidel, ‘Abkehr vom “Deutschen Christentum”...’, pp. 39-47; J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 350-359; Thomas A. Seidel, ‘...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart’: Kirchliche Neuordnung in Thüringen 1945-1951’, in: *Thüringer Gratwanderungen, Beiträge zur fünfundsiebzigjährigen Geschichte der evangelischen Landeskirche Thüringens*, ed. T. A. Seidel, (Leipzig: 1998), p. 166-188; E. Koch, ‘Thüringen’, p. 513.

⁶³ *EZAB*, 2/148, ‘Bericht’, Mitzenheim, 16/9/45; also: Werner Leich, ‘Die “Thüringer evangelische Kirche” und die “Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Thüringen” unter der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft und in der Zeit nach der Befreiung’, *Amtsblatt der Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Thüringen*, 39 (1986), p. 7; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 78-81.

⁶⁴ R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 23; J. J. Seidel, ‘Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...’, p. 29; J. J. Seidel, ‘Abkehr vom “Deutschen Christentum”...’, p. 40; K. Meier, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf*, p. 491; E. Stegmann, pp. 113-114; T. A. Seidel, ‘Im Wechsel der Systeme...’, pp. 338-340.

and create a provisional church council (LKR).⁶⁵ The provisional LKR comprised seven members: four members of the Confessing Church and three neutrals.⁶⁶ The aims of the LKR were two:

[The] reconstitution of church law and order, [and the] preservation, reconstitution and safeguarding of the confessional state of the Thuringian Evangelical Church as a church of the Lutheran confession.⁶⁷

Mitzenheim headed the provisional council as *Landesoberpfarrer* and supervised measures to abolish legislation passed during the Nazi period under the aegis of Rönck.⁶⁸ Despite questions over the legality of the *coup d'état*, Mitzenheim retained the leadership of the TeK and he viewed an invitation to a mid-summer state reception in Weimar as state recognition.⁶⁹ In keeping with the practices of other regional churches in Germany, Mitzenheim assumed the title of *Landesbischof* on 12 December 1945.⁷⁰ On 14 February 1946, the provisional LKR was replaced by an expanded, permanent LKR which comprised 16 members (12 laymen and four pastors).⁷¹ The first synod of the TeK took place at Eisenach from 17-19 October 1948. The synod approved the membership of the TeK to the United Evangelical and Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and the

⁶⁵ *LKAE*, A 155, 59, 'Die rechtliche Neuordnung der Thüringer evangelische Kirche', Oberkirchenrat G. Lotz; *LKAE*, A 239 III, Mitzenheim to Lau (Sachsen), 20/7/45; *LKAE*, A 130 II, the LKR to the American Military Administration, 3/5/45 and 23/5/45; although the new, provisional LKR was not entirely free of German Christian influence see: *LKAE*, A 130 II, Pf. Käferlein to Pf. Oskar Ziegner, 14/5/45; cf. M. Mitzenheim, *50 Jahre im Dienste der Kirche...*, pp. 91-92; J. J. Seidel, 'Abkehr vom "Deutschen Christentum"...', pp. 41-42; J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, p. 355.

⁶⁶ *EZAB*, 2/148, 'Bericht', Mitzenheim, 16/9/45; on 14/2/46, the LKR was expanded through legislation (the 'Gesetz über die Bildung eines erweiterten Landeskirchenrats') to include sixteen members: *LKAE*, A 155, 59, 'Die rechtliche Neuordnung der Thüringer evangelische Kirche', Oberkirchenrat G. Lotz; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 217, 286-287.

⁶⁷ *EZAB*, 2/148, 'Bericht', Mitzenheim, 16/9/45; also: W. Leich, p. 8.

⁶⁸ See, for example: J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 355-357.

⁶⁹ *EZAB*, 2/148, 'Bericht', Mitzenheim, 16/9/45; T. Björkman (ed.), p. 21; J. J. Seidel, 'Abkehr vom "Deutschen Christentum"...', p. 44; Thomas A. Seidel, 'Paul Dahinten und seine Chronik des Thüringer Pfarrervereins. Historische Anmerkungen zu einem liberalen Theologen', in: *Vestigia pietatis. Studien zur Geschichte der Frömmigkeit in Thüringen in Sachsen*, eds. G. Graf, E. Koch et al, (Leipzig: 2000), pp. 283-284.

⁷⁰ R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 23; C. Koch, p. 243.

⁷¹ J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 357-358, 363-365; H. Dähn, 'Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften', p. 820.

World Association of Lutheran churches, ratified the constitution of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and the Church was renamed from the *Thüringer evangelische Kirche* to the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Thüringen*.

Methodology and sources

Thuringia was selected as a case-study for three reasons. Firstly, despite the fact that Thuringia was located in the part of Germany that had been assigned to the Soviets, it was actually invaded and occupied for three months by the Americans. This makes it possible to draw some interesting comparisons and contrasts between the policies of both occupying powers to the churches. Secondly, Thuringia was the heart of the German Christian movement during the Third Reich, a detail which throws the denazification process in the TeK into sharp relief. Thirdly, Thuringia has the advantage of being more manageable than the other *Länder* of the SBZ, all of which were considerably larger in size and in population.

In terms of the chronological parameters, 1945 is the obvious starting point as the war and Nazi government was over for Thuringia in mid-April 1945. The period 1945 to 1948 is also recognised as the period of the ‘antifascist-democratic transformation’ of the SBZ under the aegis of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and then, from April 1946, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which gradually spread its influence over politics, the economy and the administration. There was, however, no attempt to impose Stalinism on politics and society in the SBZ until 1947 and 1948 when the SED made much more vigorous and repressive efforts to control public life. It was during 1948 especially that there was increasing tension between the churches and the German communists and that developments in the eastern and western zones of occupation ensured that Germany would ultimately be divided into two separate states.⁷²

⁷² On the importance of the dates 1945 to 1948 see: Arnd Bauerkämper, ‘Auf dem Wege zum “Sozialismus auf dem Lande”. Die Politik der SED 1948/49 und die Reaktionen in dörflich-agrarischen Milieus’, in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, eds. D. Hoffmann, H. Wentker, (Munich: 2000), pp. 246-247; Udo Wengst, ‘Zwischen Aufrechterhaltung der Einheit und Teilung der Nation: Das Jahr 1948 in der deutschen Geschichte’, in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, pp. 25-38, for developments in the SBZ, pp. 31-34; Jan Foitzik, ‘Zum Verhältnis zwischen SED und Besatzungsmacht: Konkordanz und Dissens’, in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, p. 55; see

As little secondary material exists on the topic, primary sources are the foundation of this dissertation. The evidence stems in the main from eight archives in Germany. The first of these, the *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin* (EZAB), offered a moderate number of relevant documents, including the circulars of the TeK and a large amount of correspondence between members of the EKD and the LKR pertaining in particular to denazification. The most valuable source for the TeK was the *Landeskirchenarchiv Eisenach* (LKAE), which preserves documents relating to church activities during the post-war period, including reports on the state of the Church, everyday correspondence and documents on denazification. Also significant were articles from *Glaube und Heimat*, the evangelical Sunday newspaper of the TeK, which was printed weekly from 21 April 1946. *Glaube und Heimat* is full of articles, for the most part written by pastors and church members, detailing the conditions of the period and making wider commentaries. There were fewer relevant documents from the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) archive at Sankt Augustin, the *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik* (ACDP), although I used a number of reports on the immediate post-war period.

As for Catholic sources, I consulted three further archives. The most important was the archive for the Erfurt diocese, the *Bistum Erfurt Archiv* (BEA). A considerable number of useful documents – including correspondence and reports – belong to a collection of boxes (over two hundred in total) that was moved from Fulda to Erfurt in 2001 and has been untouched since. Other valuable materials include a significant volume of reports on refugees and on Church and State relations. Brief visits to the Catholic archives at Würzburg and Fulda, the *Diözesan Archiv Würzburg* (DAW) and the *Bistum Fulda Archiv* (BFA), yielded more evidence, though not to the extent of the Erfurt archive. I had anticipated this given that these archives hold only documents from the Meiningen and Geisa areas respectively.

also: Frédéric Hartweg (ed.), *SED und Kirche. Eine Dokumentation ihrer Beziehungen. Band I: 1946-1967*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: 1995), p. 24; Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic 1945-1990*, (Harlow: 2000), pp. 44-45; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 31ff.

Source material from the Thuringian Ministry of the Interior at the state archive in Weimar, the *Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar* (ThHStAW), was also useful. The documents largely detail Church and State relations and aspects of the denazification process. In addition to the archival records, I also used some published primary material. Most importantly, this included two collections of reports and eyewitness accounts of the end of the war, *Kriegsende und Neubeginn im Landkreis Eichsfeld 1945/1946* and *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens (Band 8/9). Thüringen unter dem Sternenbanner April bis Juni 1945*, as well as a compilation of Thuringians' memoirs from 1930 to 1947, *Quellen zur Geschichte Thüringens*.

However, there are two issues relating to the primary evidence. The first involves the nature of the sources. The majority of the documents originate from the clerical elite: either the pastorate or the church authorities. One consequence was that a thoroughgoing *Alltagsgeschichte* has not been possible. However, in addition to some source material authored by 'ordinary' people, much clerical correspondence and a great many reports reflect community life and everyday attitudes and behaviours. Even reports from the highest levels of the church hierarchy also appraise the general situation of the population. In all, sources from laymen and clergy alike have allowed a comprehensive grasp of the church situation and permitted a general social history with some aspects of *Alltagsgeschichte*.

The second issue concerns censorship. In regard to the evangelical weekly newspaper, *Glaube und Heimat*, the Russian censor was active before the newspaper went to print, and the editors had to be cognisant of the material they admitted. Approximately a year after the re-foundation of *Glaube und Heimat* in April 1946 (printing was suspended on 1 June 1941), the censor switched to review the paper after publication and he was allegedly harsher. Nevertheless, apart from two articles that were omitted from the first issue, there were no significant censorship problems until after the creation of the GDR in 1949.⁷³ After all, the newspaper did not deal at all with politics, but rather with matters of faith. In internal church correspondence too, discussions were focussed on purely

⁷³ See: *GuH*, n. 16, 16/4/2006, p. 15.

religious matters. Where politics was discussed, it was often with a view to establishing a distinction between Church and State which was desired by both the Soviet Military Administration in Thuringia (SMATh) and the churches alike. Overall, the content of the sources concerns purely social conditions and issues within individual parishes or the churches at large and was not influenced by external agencies. The churches, after all, enjoyed significant freedom of religion from the SMATh.

Structure

As to the structure of the thesis, chapters one, two and three explore the wider context of the churches and general issues associated with the period, including the influx of refugees into Thuringia. The aim is to represent the position and role of the churches in terms of the religious freedom that was offered by the Russian occupiers. The first chapter shows the parameters within which the churches operated in 1945 and reveals how, amidst the fears and anxieties of local populations, the churches were permitted by both the Americans and Soviets to occupy an important position in society. The second chapter seeks to provide a church-political context by exploring Church and State relations and particularly the complex interaction between the churches and the Americans, Russians and German communists. Chapter three reveals that, despite their relative freedom of movement, the churches, and especially the Catholic Church, were ultimately unable to offer spiritual and material aid to all believers.

The aim of chapters four and five is to investigate the behaviour and *mentalité* of Christians with a view to evaluating the popular influence of the institutional churches. Chapter four seeks to analyse church attendance and participation between 1945 and 1948. The result of this inquiry shows that there was some form of decline in the popularity of the churches between 1945 and 1948 and they were unable to make people attend services regularly. Chapter five demonstrates how the churches ultimately lacked the authority to influence the everyday behaviours of the Christian population. This is shown in the context of a case study on the treatment of refugees by native Thuringians. The churches invested much time and effort in seeking to co-opt the Thuringian

population at large to help the refugees. These efforts were largely in vain and the churches' failure implies their limited social influence.

Finally, chapters six and seven focus on the role of the Nazi past in the post-war churches, particularly the TeK. In doing so, the analysis underscores the freedom of the churches and their prominent position in the post-war period as well as showing how this liberty was ultimately insufficient to enable the TeK to manipulate the attitudes of believers. Chapter six deals with why the processes of self-denazification in the churches were not thorough. Chapter seven examines attitudes. In particular, why did the TeK fail to offer a general confession of guilt? Despite this, there were attempts in the TeK and throughout Germany to impress feelings of guilt upon the wider community. The Thuringian population summarily rejected these elite ideas of responsibility for Nazism. Parishioners viewed themselves as victims of National Socialism rather than perpetrators. It is evident in this that the moral influence of the TeK amongst its parishioners was severely limited.

As a matter of necessity there are limits to the dissertation. Greater secular-political issues, church-political issues and economic issues have all deferred to the social realities of the post-war period and to the concerns of faith communities in Thuringia. This study is above all a social history. Because of a dearth of evidence in the archives or a lack of space and relevance, a number of possible areas of further investigation also have been skirted or traced only in brief. These include issues associated with youth groups, prisoners of war, and gender issues pertaining to rape and abortion. This was unfortunate but unavoidable.

Notes on quotations and referencing:

All quotations from German sources used in the main text appear in translation. There are only occasional exceptions where the meaning is readily apparent or an idiom is used; for example, 'nein' and 'Gott sei Dank' (Thank God!). This is not the case in the footnotes. The references are given in German in an attempt to remain true to the precise nature of the document(s) in question. Therefore, 'Report for 1946' appears as 'Bericht über das Jahr 1946'. Long references are also abbreviated as much as possible, though not to the extent of obscuring the location. For instance, GBVP bzw. Fulda is the abbreviation for documents from the *Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Paderborn bzw. Fulda: Pfarreien, Dekanate, Stiftungen, Einrichtungen etc. auf dem Gebiet der Heutigen Diözese Erfurt*. Finally, regarding correspondence, unless otherwise noted, the local church is intended when it is stated, for example, 'Bilzingsleben to Fulda'. That is, the church community at Bilzingsleben to Fulda. In the same vein, Erfurt and Fulda, as the major administrative seats of the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese and the Fulda diocese respectively, indicate the church authorities unless otherwise stated.

1:

The end of the war, the occupiers and the churches

Although the war was officially concluded on 7/8 May 1945, it was over for Thuringia from mid-April. Thuringia, in fact, experienced two separate occupations. In accordance with prior agreements concerning zonal boundaries, the Americans withdrew from Thuringia at the beginning of July 1945 to make way for the Russians. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the environment in which the churches had to operate at the end of World War Two. In particular, what were the attitudes of the population to American and Soviet occupation and what was the role of the churches in their communities during the final days of the war and the weeks after its cessation?

The chapter is divided into four sections which look in turn at events at the end of the war, popular attitudes to the Americans and to the Russians, and the position of the churches within their communities. The attitudes of the Thuringian population to allied occupation varied greatly. The arrivals of both the Americans and the Red Army were regarded, initially, with fear, though in some places anxiety was soon replaced by relief. Particularly with regard to the Soviet occupation, there was an enduring fear on account of the brutality of many Red Army troops. At the end of the war, in Thuringia and throughout Germany, the churches occupied an intermediary position between the population and the occupying forces as the population turned to them for support. It was largely the pressures of the community that dictated the revival of church life after the war. The events and attitudes of 1945 were very important in setting the background for Church and State interaction and the position of the churches in the community in the period 1945 to 1948.

In this chapter, two key themes are apparent. Firstly, reactions to the end of the war and the attitudes of German civilians to their conquerors were determined above all by local

factors. Cut off from the outside world, communities turned inwards on themselves and their attentions were focussed on immediate and entirely local concerns. Second, the attitudes of those who belonged to the churches or attended services were little different from those who did not. Given the fact that over 90 percent of people in Thuringia were registered as church members, it is hardly surprising that the responses and attitudes of Christians were identical to those of communities as a whole.

The bulk of the data on which this chapter is based comes from the primarily Catholic region of Eichsfeld. Detailed reports on the end of the war in Protestant areas are, unfortunately, rather sparse. The Eichsfeld state and church archives in Heiligenstadt, by contrast, contain an unusually rich collection of reports written by clergymen and *Bürgermeister* (mayors) in the aftermath of the war.

The end of the war

The end of the war and the American occupation of Thuringia were experienced by local populations in different ways. The behaviour of American troops and the measures imposed by the military authorities were not always uniform, as a result of which there were considerable variations in people's attitudes towards their occupiers. A report compiled by an observer, Dr. Johannes Müller, described the end of the war in Eichsfeld. As air raid sirens grew more frequent and artillery fire closer in early April 1945, normal life became increasingly irregular: work slowed down, newspapers were no longer published and Nazis disappeared from the streets.¹ The constant danger forced many to remain in cellars for hours on end.² Tension grew with the withdrawal of German troops and the American advance.³ A zealous minority clung to hopes of victory, but the majority of the population was overwhelmed by war exhaustion.⁴ A report from Beuren,

¹ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 27; cf. H. Siebert, p. 17.

² *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 28.

³ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 191ff, also: Mackenrode, p. 288.

⁴ In Bremen: Albrecht Mertz, 'Bremer Kriegstagebuch vom April 1945', in: *Kriegsende in Bremen. Erinnerungen, Berichte, Dokumente*, eds. H. Müller, G. Rohdenburg, 3rd edtn, (Bremen: 2005), p. 50.

for instance, stated: 'The persistent cling to their idol Hitler and still believe in his prophesied victory...[yet] most wish the end of the war...[and] it is often heard, better the end with horrors than horrors without end.'⁵

With American occupation, there were house searches and curfews, and weapons, cameras and binoculars were confiscated. Immediately after the occupation of Heiligenstadt, the directives of the American commandant were issued from the town marketplace. The curfew was effective immediately and weapons were confiscated.⁶ Restrictions confined local populations to their towns and American soldiers were quartered in houses while the inhabitants were often forced to find accommodation elsewhere.⁷ In many cases, former Nazis were imprisoned and a new local government was established.⁸ Denazification measures swept through the Beuren bureaucracy and many officials were dismissed from their posts including the *Bürgermeister*. Still, the replacement had been, evidently, an even more active Nazi.⁹ Early denazification was generally pushed through with little incident.¹⁰

⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Beuren, p. 111; Siebert, p. 17.

⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 30, at Arenshausen/Hohengandern, p. 66, at Beuren, p. 112; M. Kramann, p. 294; A. Schaefer, p. 48; *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94; elsewhere: H. Kreutzer, p. 29ff; Ursula Preiß, 'Davongekommen in Wiesenthal/Rhön', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 104; Ruth Knabe, 'In der Stadtverwaltung von Hildburghausen', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 108.

⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, p. 70, Brehme, p. 125, Brteitenholz, p. 131, Breitenworbis, p. 136, Geisladen, pp. 164-165.

⁸ *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 228.

⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Beuren, p. 112; cf. at Heiligenstadt: R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 15; at Jena: J. Fügner, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ H. Patze, W. Schlesinger (eds.), p. 563; H. Hömig, 'Thüringen unter dem Nationalsozialismus', pp. 26-27; H. Kreutzer, pp. 31,41; Gertrud Albrecht, 'Nochmals Hildburghausen', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 114.

Crime and insecurity created a prevalent uncertainty.¹¹ At Arenhausen, a town watch was established by the local *Bürgermeister*.¹² On 26 April, a circular from Heiligenstadt ordered the establishment of a town watch throughout towns in the district.¹³ The primary threats to public order came from foreign workers, liberated prisoners-of-war and local trouble makers. For example, foreign workers stole food, clothing and bicycles in the Böseckendorf district, Serbs plundered houses in and around Breitenworbis and Poles broke into properties in Eichstruth.¹⁴ Italian prisoners were prevented by the Americans from looting Arenshausen shops, although a number of isolated estates, such as those at Oberstein/Unterstein and Bornhagen/Unterhof, were completely looted.¹⁵ On other hand, in some places returning French and Belgian prisoners-of-war were reported as keeping good discipline and isolated incidents of disorder were regarded by locals as 'understandable'.¹⁶ Returning German soldiers, meanwhile, were taken into custody by the Americans and imprisoned in makeshift camps such as the one at Bad Kreuznach.¹⁷

American occupation

Attitudes to American occupation varied according to local circumstances. Fear, often followed by relief, was common but so were curiosity and surprise. Fear was a natural

¹¹ F. Behr, pp. 43-44; *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94; *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, pp. 66, 67; cf. Günterode, p. 183, Leinefelde, p. 276, Lengenfeld/Stein, p. 279; H. Patze, W. Schlesinger, p. 564.

¹² *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, p. 68, Worbis, p. 363; cf. *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Heinz F., 9/94, Lothar B., 21/10/94.

¹³ *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, pp. 68-69, see also: Rengelrode, p. 301, Wilbich, p. 349.

¹⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Böseckendorf, p. 122, Breitenworbis, p. 141, Eichstruth, p. 159; see also: Holungen, pp. 238-239, Jützenbach, p. 244, Kalteneber, p. 248, Lutter/Fürstenhagen, p. 286, Rengelrode, p. 301, Rüstungen, p. 305, Teistungen, p. 323, Worbis, p. 358; H. Siebert, p. 87; J. Fügner, p. 38; H. Kreutzer, p. 39; Friedel Brendel, 'Kriegsende, Gerüchte, Plünderungen (Weida vom 14. bis 26. 4. 1945)', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 132.

¹⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, pp. 67, 69.

¹⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, p. 70.

¹⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Arenshausen/Hohengandern, p. 69, Kalteneber, p. 248; G. Albrecht, p. 116.

reaction amongst many Germans during the last days of the war. In Bremen, for instance, the advance of British troops occasioned a concern for safety amongst the population.¹⁸ The same was true in Mannheim as the American approached.¹⁹ In Thuringia, it was widely understood that, if German troops attempted to defend a town, the Americans were most likely to respond with artillery bombardments and, sometimes, air-raids. There was, as a result, much anxiety when German military units were in the area.²⁰ American troops entered Heiligenstadt unopposed on 9 April and Dr. Müller observed: ‘The slightest resistance and they would have reduced Heiligenstadt to rubble in short order.’²¹ The population of Hausen also understood the futility of resistance and realised that it could only have destructive results.²² Wehrmacht plans to defend Beuren also came to nothing, much to the relief of the *Bürgermeister* and the local populace.²³

Tension, fear and even horror amongst people in the last days of the war were replaced, in most places, by a collective relief that the war was over and that the American occupiers were largely well-behaved.²⁴ According to the memoir of a doctor at

¹⁸ Peter Groth, “‘Bremen war nur noch ein Wrack’. Die Einnahme Bremens durch die Engländer im April 1945’, in: *Kriegsende in Bremen. Erinnerungen, Berichte, Dokumente*, p. 37; Hartmut Müller, “‘Es war der 25. April, als für mich eine Welt zusammenbrach”. Gedanken – Positionen – Erinnerungen Bremer Bürgerinnen und Bürger bei Kriegsende’, in: *Kriegsende in Bremen. Erinnerungen, Berichte, Dokumente*, p. 88; Renate Meyer-Braun, ‘Wie Bremer Frauen das Kriegsende erlebten’, in: *Kriegsende in Bremen. Erinnerungen, Berichte, Dokumente*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁹ Volker Keller, *Mannheim 1945. Kriegsende und Neubeginn*, (Kassel: 2004), pp. 7, 25-28.

²⁰ Gudrun Braune (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte Thüringens. Erinnerungen an die Zeit zwischen 1930 bis 1947*, (Erfurt: 1996), pp. 136-137 (Magdalena B.); *Kriegsende...*, Bernterode/Worbis, p. 109, Breitenworbis, p. 141, Günterode, p. 185, Heiligenstadt, pp. 193-194, Leinefelde, pp. 271-272, Mackenrode, p. 287, Pfaffschwende, p. 296, Schachtebich/Burgwalde, p. 309, Zella, pp. 374-375.

²¹ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 29, Beberstedt, p. 106, Beuren, p. 111.

²² *Kriegsende...*, Hausen, p. 188.

²³ *Kriegsende...*, Beuren, pp. 111-112, see also: Breitenholz, pp. 133, 140, Heuthen, p. 232, Hildebrandhausen, p. 234.

²⁴ On uncertainty, fear and even ‘terror’ see: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Hans Sinz (Gerstungen) to the BGVP, 1/5/46; *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche Kriegssache 1939-1947, ‘Bericht’, Freusberg, 22/4/45; Julius Hackethal, *Der Wahn, der mich beglückt. Karriere und Ketzerei eines Arztes*, (Ulm: 1997), p. 206; G. Braune (ed.), p. 16 (Lydia H.), p. 78 (Hildegart S.), p. 107 (Hedi B.), p. 141 (Ruth K.); E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, pp. 111-115; F. Brendel, pp. 130-131; H. Kretzer, p. 39; U. Preiß, pp. 102-104; *Kriegsende...*, Breitenholz, p. 133, Ecklingerode, p. 154-155, Eichstruth, p. 158, Geismar, pp. 169-170, Großbartloff, p. 174, Keffershausen, pp. 255-256, Kella, p. 260, Kleinbartloff, pp. 265-266, Leinefelde, pp. 273-275, Rengelrode, p. 301, Teistungen, p. 322, Wilbich, p. 346, Worbis, p. 357,

Heiligenstadt: ‘All the worries and fears of the past years, which had always burdened me at least subliminally, were but swept away after 5 April [1945].’²⁵ At Asbach, the arrival of American troops occasioned relief, although there was some tension due to the prevailing uncertainty.²⁶ The inhabitants of Ollendorf, near Weimar, also had a continuing fear of the American troops. This was possibly due to the town’s proximity to Buchenwald and the angry reaction of the Americans upon their discovery of the camp.²⁷ However, the verb *aufatmen* (or noun – *Aufatmen*), to breathe a sigh of relief, features in many reports.²⁸

The result was that, soon after occupation, life largely resumed its normal course.²⁹ Dieterode, for instance, negotiated the period of the German collapse with ‘relative political and military calm’.³⁰ A similar situation was reported in Reinhalterode, where the occupation had proceeded ‘extraordinarily well’.³¹ A report on the arrival of the Americans in Kleinbartloff on 10 April was more effusive in its evaluation of the onset of occupation, which, according to the author, was greeted by the local population with

Wüstheuterode, p. 364, Zella, p. 374; also at Duderstadt: H.-H. Eberling (ed.), p. 15; at Bremen: Hartmut Müller, ‘“Jetzt wissen auch wir, was Front heißt”. Britische Truppen südlich vor Bremen’, in: *Kriegsende in Bremen. Erinnerungen, Berichte, Dokumente*, pp. 24-28; Manfred Malzahn (ed.), *Germany 1945-1949: A sourcebook*, (London: 1991), pp. 41-42. There is an interesting contrast in an internal security *Stimmungsbericht* from Stuttgart dated 27 March 1945. It was observed that the local population was ‘nearly happy’ and that ‘nowhere’ was there a fear of the Americans or the English: Klaus-Jörg Ruhl (ed.), *Deutschland 1945. Alltag zwischen Krieg und Frieden in Berichten, Dokumenten und Bildern*, (Darmstadt: 1984), pp. 82-83.

²⁵ J. Hackethal, p. 207; cf. T. A. Seidel, ‘Befreiung oder Besatzung?...’, p. 39ff; J. Fügner, p. 35.

²⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Asbach, p. 104; see also: G. Braune (ed.), p. 60 (Herta B.).

²⁷ *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, ‘Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)’, Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94.

²⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Beuren, p. 112, Ecklingerode, p. 155, Ershausen, p. 162, Geisladen, p. 165, Heiligenstadt, p. 195, Schachtebich/Burgwalde, p. 310, Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 337; G. Braune (ed.), p. 78 (Hildegart S.); Evemarie Babstübner-Peters, ‘Durchkommen und Überleben’, in: *Zeitbrüche – Lebensbrüche. Frauenalltag in Thüringen 1945*, ed. M. Moritz, (Erfurt: 1995), p. 28.

²⁹ G. Braune (ed.), p. 140 (Margot K.); U. Preiß, pp. 104-5; *Kriegsende...*, Asbach, p. 104, Beuren, p. 112, Bickenriede, p. 115, Birkungen, p. 118, Großbartloff, p. 174, Hausen, p. 186, Hundeshagen, p. 242; also at Duderstadt: H.-H. Eberling (ed.), pp. 13-14.

³⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Dieterode, p. 149.

³¹ *Kriegsende...*, Reinhalterode, p. 297.

excitement ‘inclined toward joy’.³² Relief replaced many fears and eased the initial post-war period such that “normal life” could resume.

In some places, American troops were the objects of wonder and curiosity.³³ The Americans’ tanks, motorised units and communications equipment, along with the calm and order of the troops, astonished the Heiligenstadt population.³⁴ A report filed in September 1945 by the Beberstedt priest, Meinolf Jünemann, recalled the arrival of the Americans on 10 April 1945. According to Jünemann, as the inhabitants lined the streets to watch rank after rank of American soldiers march through the town, they were overcome by a sense of disbelief that Hitler could have been so ‘mad’ as to declare war on a country whose power was ‘unquantifiable’.³⁵ The same was true at Kleinbartloff where the population took to the streets in excitement to see American tanks and troops pass through the town.³⁶ Most people, except the most fanatical Nazis, recognised that the war was lost and viewed American occupation as preferable to Russian occupation. On the other hand, in some towns, people were so afraid that the Americans would inflict bodily harm on them that they did not venture out from their homes.³⁷

The contradictory responses of different communities may be explained by people’s view of the American arrival as either a conquest or liberation.³⁸ Those who perceived the end of the war in terms of defeat and conquest were probably more likely to regard the Americans with fear. In those localities where there were significant numbers of anti-Nazis, or where Nazi rule in the final months and weeks of the war had been particularly

³² *Kriegsende...*, Kleinbartloff, p. 266, also at Jützenbach, p. 244; at Stuttgart: K-J. Ruhl (ed.), p. 85.

³³ F. Behr, p. 32; F. Brendel, p. 133; H. Kreutzer, p. 39.

³⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 29, see also: Kella, p. 261, Reinholterode, p. 300, Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 336; G. Braune (ed.), p. 142 (Ruth K.), p. 161 (Wolfgang B.).

³⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Beberstedt, p. 106, also: Teistungen, p. 323; H. Kreutzer, p. 39.

³⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Kleinbartloff, p. 266; also at Henneberg: Werner Meyer, ‘Kriegsende im Hennebergischen’, in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 84.

³⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Großbodungen, p. 179, cf. Wüstheuterode, p. 366.

³⁸ See on a discussion of the American conquest of Thuringia as a liberation: T. A. Seidel, ‘Befreiung oder Besatzung?...’, p. 39ff; J. Fügner, p. 35.

brutal, people were more inclined to regard the Americans as liberators.³⁹ For example, a doctor in Thuringia remembered:

Within me developed a firm feeling of thankfulness toward the Americans that endures until today. We have them to thank above all that the Nazi government was broken. This [gratitude] was strengthened by the behaviour of the GIs during their occupation of our farms and towns, which the Nazis had prophesied would be barbarous, but which could not have been more humane.⁴⁰

From the point of view of the churches and of practicing Christians, the arrival of the Americans was 'liberating' in the sense that the new military authorities permitted an almost unrestricted freedom of religious belief and of worship (see below, chapter two). Another cause of relief was that 'an expanse of rubble and bodies' was avoided, that normal life could resume, and that Thuringia, and the Eichsfeld district in particular, had largely escaped the worst physical effects of the war.⁴¹

One aspect of the American occupation that engendered considerable interest and comment on the part of Thuringians was the presence of African-American soldiers.⁴² In this respect, Thuringia was no different from those other parts of Germany where African-American or French-Moroccan soldiers were stationed. Although Nazi propaganda had portrayed soldiers of colour as base, vicious and bestial, many Germans found them to be well disciplined and approachable. One German recounted, for instance, that most of the troops that occupied his town were black Americans, 'yet they were all good-natured and friendly'.⁴³ At Saalfeld in Southern Thuringia, Katharina Link, the

³⁹ H. Kreutzer, p. 28; elsewhere: V. Keller, p. 25; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁰ J. Hackethal, p. 207.

⁴¹ *Kriegsende...*, Dingelstädt, p. 152, Erhausen, p. 161, Leinefelde, p. 271; Geisladen, p. 165; G. Braune (ed.), pp. 78-79 (Hildegart S.).

⁴² For example: G. Braune (ed.), pp. 161, 165 (Wolfgang B.); *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94.

⁴³ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949*, (New Haven: 2003), pp. 64-65 (emphasis mine); R. Meyer-Braun, pp. 141-142; also see: Margarete Dörr, *Durchkommen und Überleben, Frauenerfahrungen in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit*, (Frankfurt: 1998), pp. 395, 404ff; Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, Dennis Showalter (eds.), *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*,

mother of the local Catholic priest, remarked: ‘American vehicles raced recklessly through the town; strong, young, well-nourished men amongst whom also a negro at the wheel in the same uniform as the whites.’ There was evidently some surprise that the African American soldiers were ostensibly on the same footing (wearing the ‘same uniform’) as white soldiers. In fact, Frau Link described everything the American occupiers were and the Germans were not: strong, young, well-nourished and multi-cultural.⁴⁴ In addition, a diary entry dated 17 April 1945, submitted as part of the Breitenworbis priest’s report on 23 July 1946, noted as a curiosity that ‘in the cigarette factory by the pond and in some private houses live black Americans’.⁴⁵ One woman also exclaimed upon the arrival of African-Americans in her village: ‘I saw a negro, a real negro!’⁴⁶ Surprise may be attributed to the lack of ethnic diversity amongst the German population and also, perhaps, to the realisation that Nazi propaganda had been mendacious. No overt hostility towards African-American troops can be detected in the Thuringian sources.

According to the reports of clergymen and *Bürgermeister*, the occupying Americans in general acted appropriately.⁴⁷ The Americans at Ecklingerode were well-behaved and ‘only a small burden’, while those stationed at Teistungen left a good and disciplined impression.⁴⁸ Initial tensions at Asbach were allayed, and there was a good relationship

(New York: 1994), pp. 504-505; Jürgen Kleindienst (ed.), *Lebertran und Chewing Gum, Kindheit in Deutschland, 1945-1950*, (Berlin: 2000), p. 26.

⁴⁴ DAW K4 28, ‘Abschrift aus dem Tagebuch der Frau Katharina Link gewesene Studienrätin, Mutter des Herrn Pfarrer Hans Link, 1945’, 17/4/45; cf. *Kriegsende...*, Arenhausen/ Hohengandern, p. 67, Teistungen, p. 323.

⁴⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Breitenworbis, p. 142, also at Uder, p. 328.

⁴⁶ G. Braune (ed.), p. 139 (Ingrid H.).

⁴⁷ J. Hackethal, p. 206; G. Braune (ed.), pp. 107-108; *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, ‘Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)’, Herrmann T., 19/10/94, Familie Ernst B., 20/10/94, Lothar B. and Ilse L., 21/10/94, Eheleute E., 2/11/94; Käthe Meyer-Weyrich, ‘...was ware uns nicht alles erspart geblieben’, in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), pp. 137-138; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 196, Holungen, p. 238, Kefferhausen, p. 255, Kirchgandern, p. 264, Lengenfeld/Stein, p. 279, Reinhalterode, p. 298, Teistungen, p. 323, Weißenborn/Lüderode, p. 337, Worbis, p. 358; cf. in Bremen: H. Müller, p. 28.

⁴⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Ecklingerode, p. 155, Teistungen, p. 323; see also: G. Braune (ed.), p. 139 (Ingrid H.).

between the troops and the local population.⁴⁹ In most towns the occupation lasted only a matter of days or simply overnight.⁵⁰

In some places, however, there were frictions between the Americans and German communities. In various places throughout Germany, Americans plundered and committed violent crimes including rape, which was sometimes punished by execution.⁵¹ In Thuringia, routine house searches were sometimes the pretext for theft.⁵² At Geisladen, alcohol was stolen, schnapps was taken from the priest at Kalteneber, and articles removed from houses in Struth were described by the Americans as ‘souvenirs’.⁵³ The local priest at Hohengandern, Father Böning, reported on 22 April 1945 that the Americans forced all citizens onto the streets during house searches and were particularly ‘unfair’.⁵⁴ Böning was amongst a group of townspeople whom the Americans temporarily locked in a barn. Upon his release, he found that the vicarage had been ravaged and that the candles for the First Communion and the mass wine were missing.⁵⁵ A soldier who stole a case of cigarettes from a factory near Lenterode incited the entire sack of the factory by both troops and civilians, and, at Weissenborn-Lüderode, the occasional rape sullied an otherwise harmonious relationship between the population and the occupying forces.⁵⁶ It was also not unusual for erratic American driving to lead to accidents; at Uder and Hohengandern, for example, young boys were run over.⁵⁷ The Americans’ conduct, of course, was not always exemplary.

⁴⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Asbach, p. 105, Neustadt, p. 295, Pfaffschwende, p. 296, Reinhalterode, p. 297, Rohrberg, p. 304, Struth, p. 317, Zella, p. 375; G. Braune (ed.), p. 147 (Friedel D.).

⁵⁰ For example: *Kriegsende...*, Gerbershausen, p. 172, Großbartloff, p. 174, Siemerode, p. 313.

⁵¹ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: 1991), p. 79; Harold Zink, *The United States in Germany 1944-1955*, (Princeton: 1957), p. 137.

⁵² G. Albrecht, pp. 117-118.

⁵³ *Kriegsende...*, Geisladen, p. 164, Kalteneber, p. 248, Struth, p. 318, see also: Deuna, p. 149, Gerbershausen, p. 172, Heuthen, p. 233, Hüpstedt, p. 241, Kefferhausen, p. 255, Siemerode, p. 312, Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 337, Wiesenfeld, p. 341; W. Meyer, p. 87.

⁵⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Hohengandern, p. 235.

⁵⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Hohengandern, pp. 235-236, Kella, p. 261.

⁵⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Lenterode, p. 283, likewise at Rüstungen, p. 306, and Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 337.

⁵⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Uder, p. 328, Hohengandern, p. 236.

Russian occupation

Between 1 and 6 July 1945, the short American occupation of Thuringia came to an end and Soviet hegemony was established amidst singing by the new occupiers.⁵⁸ In reports on the end of the war deposited at the Eichsfeld state and church archives in Heiligenstadt, far less information details the arrival of the Soviets in July 1945 than the American invasion three months earlier. Two major reasons for this may be ventured. Firstly, the end of the war and the initial American occupation commanded more attention from the authors – mostly *Bürgermeister* and priests – because it was their first experience of occupation. Secondly, there may have been a certain bias in the reports submitted by *Bürgermeister*. The majority of these accounts were written at the end of 1945 and mid to late-1946. The KPD/SED had, in late-1945 and throughout 1946, expanded their control over local government in some localities in Eichsfeld. This was particularly true after 21/22 April 1946, when the KPD merged with the SPD to form the SED. The SED therefore often had influence over many *Bürgermeister* through former KPD and SPD members. For example, the report of the Hundeshagen *Bürgermeister* observed that the Russian occupation was moderate and passed largely without incident. However, the *Bürgermeister* decreed that every youth over 14 years old was obligated to enter the Free German Youth (FDJ) and every Hundeshagen inhabitant was to become a member of the Free German Trade Union (FDGB). Both organisations were run by German communists and it is highly likely that the *Bürgermeister* himself was a member of the SED.⁵⁹ Libel against the Russian occupiers could have had political consequences and the report writers, as a result, dealt with the occupation in neutral terms or in a summary fashion.

⁵⁸ H. A. Welsh, 'Thüringen', pp. 167, 173-174; on singing see, for example, *Kriegsende...*, Uder, p. 328, Volkerode, p. 330; on the differences between American and Soviet equipment: *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, 'Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)', Lothar B., 21.10.1994.

⁵⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Hundeshagen, pp. 242-244; see also reports from: Geisleden, pp. 165-168, and Weißenborn-Lüderode, pp. 335-338.

The same bias is highly unlikely, however, in church sources. A report completed by Heinrich Siebert in June 1946 and an anonymous report filed in August 1946 about the situation in Eichsfeld both openly criticised the Russian occupation and the activities of their KPD/SED allies. In spite of this, the authors were not censured or punished.⁶⁰ The Russian authorities were loath to alienate the churches and, indeed, even interceded for the Catholic Church in Eichsfeld (see below, pp. 58-60). Despite the problems with some secular accounts, they do allow an insight into several broad streams of reaction to the Russian occupation. Most Thuringians regarded the prospect of being occupied by the Red Army with trepidation. In some places, there was relief when the reality of Soviet rule turned out to be milder than had been feared. In other places there remained an enduring anxiety at the presence of Russian soldiers.

In part the widespread fear of the Soviets was a result of years of Nazi propaganda about the 'subhuman Slavonic hordes' and the 'Judeo-Bolshevik' threat.⁶¹ According to the first Russian commandant of Heiligenstadt, Major Dsilichow: 'Fascist ideology, anti-communism and anti-Soviet agitation still played a great role amongst many people in the summer of 1945. People had, as a consequence of fascist propaganda, a wholly uneducated fear of the Russians.'⁶² Many people had already fled before the arrival of the Red Army and a large number of those who remained viewed the American withdrawal as an abandonment.⁶³ At Kalteneber, for instance, two nuns left when they heard that the arrival of the Russians was imminent.⁶⁴ There was fear amongst those who stayed. One

⁶⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, pp. 191-211.

⁶¹ On Nazi propaganda and reports of atrocities: Hermann Glaser, '1945. Die Befreiung von der NS-Gewaltherrschaft', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 1-2, (1995), pp. 6-7; T. A. Seidel, 'Befreiung oder Besatzung?...', p. 37; T. A. Seidel, 'Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse...', pp. 113-114; Jürgen John, 'Thüringen 1945. Vorgeschichte, Rahmenbedingungen, Problemlagen', in: *Zeitbrüche – Lebensbrüche. Frauenalltag in Thüringen 1945*, p. 16; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 84; H. Glaser, *1945. Beginn einer Zukunft...*, pp. 38-39.

⁶² R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 15, Russian entrance into Heiligenstadt: pp. 26-27.

⁶³ T. A. Seidel, 'Befreiung oder Besatzung?...', pp. 29, 37; H. Kreutzer, p. 44; Karl Heinz Pörtge, 'Merker – kleiner Ort, großes Ziel', in: *Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens*, 8-9, (1988-1989), p. 122; on the long-term psychological effects see: Anita Eckstaedt, 'Vertriebenenschicksale – psychoanalytisch gesehen', in: *Vertriebene in Deutschland. Interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, eds. D. Hoffmann, M. Krauss, M. Schwartz, (Munich: 2000), pp. 368-369; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 89.

⁶⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Kalteneber, p. 249.

doctor at Heiligenstadt remembered that ‘a cold shiver went down my spine’ at the sight of the Russians marching into the town.⁶⁵ A report from Keffershausen noted that there was ‘agitation and uncertainty’, and, at Wüstheuterode, ‘fear and horror’.⁶⁶ According to the report writers, however, fears were largely unfounded. The report from the Weissenborn-Lüderode *Bürgermeister* remarked that, despite all the anxieties which were incited by Nazi propaganda, the population respected the Russians on account of their just behaviour and conduct.⁶⁷

In some places, the attitudes of the German population to the Soviet occupation, as reflected in clerical and secular accounts, were remarkably similar to those surrounding the American occupation.⁶⁸ Relief replaced fear. As with the onset of American occupation, the most widespread question at Kalteneber was: ‘How will it [Russian occupation] turn out?’ Yet almost nothing untoward followed the arrival of the Red Army.⁶⁹ There was ostensibly so little change that matter of fact statements dominated reports. For example, one summed up the start of the occupation: ‘The first Russians appeared in Grossbartloff on 6 July.’⁷⁰ Initial relations between the stationed troops and the local populations were evidently more often than not peaceful and ‘satisfactory’.⁷¹ This was the case at Breitenholz after rumours spread about what the Russians would do and who would ‘take the rap’.⁷² It was similar throughout the SBZ as many realised the myth of Nazi propaganda. One man remembered that, after receiving two packets of

⁶⁵ J. Hackethal, p. 209; A. Schaefer, p. 52.

⁶⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Keffershausen, p. 259, Wüstheuterode, p. 370, see also: Volkerode, p. 330; H. Siebert, pp. 34-36, 38; A. Schaefer, pp. 52-54; uncertainty also at Kleinreinsdorf and elsewhere: G. Braune (ed.), p. 22 (Hildegard R.), p. 147 (Friedel D.), p. 161 (Wolfgang B.).

⁶⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 338; also at Jena: T. A. Seidel, ‘Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse...’, p. 114; K. Meyer-Weyrich, p. 139.

⁶⁸ G. Braune (ed.), p. 119 (Günter T.); *Kriegsende...*, Asbach, p. 105, Schwobfeld, p. 311; at Jena: Jens Fügner, p. 38.

⁶⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Kalteneber, p. 249, also at Zaunröden, p. 374; see in addition: F. Behr, p. 39; K. Meyer-Weyrich, p. 139.

⁷⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Großbartloff, p. 178, Leinefelde, p. 276.

⁷¹ For example: *Kriegsende...*, Breitenholz, p. 134, Geisleden, pp. 165-166.

⁷² *Kriegsende...*, Breitenholz, p. 134, it was similar at Breitenworbis, p. 143.

cigarettes, he conceded ‘the image of Soviet sub-humans I had carried with me finally collapsed’.⁷³

Instead of uncontrollable Russian troops wreaking havoc, it was unruly brigades, ‘mostly even Germans’, which concerned inhabitants at Breitenholz.⁷⁴ At Dieterode, the local priest noted that the discipline of the Russians was good, while another clergyman, from Wüstheuterode, reported that Red Army soldiers were humane and initial fears had amounted to nothing.⁷⁵ There were no violent outbreaks at Geisleden and the Soviets participated in the economic life of the town by buying cigars and foodstuffs from the local population.⁷⁶ Quarters in German houses also generally entailed no great drama.⁷⁷ The Hundeshagen *Bürgermeister* reported that Red Army officers and troops ‘showed in every respect correct behaviour’.⁷⁸ While positive assessments of the Russians in a number of reports from Eichsfeld may have been somewhat exaggerated, the evidence suggests that, in some places at least, Soviet occupation did not weigh too heavily on local populations.⁷⁹

On the other hand, there were localities where the experience of Russian occupation was indubitably harsh, and where Red Army troops carried out numerous assaults and acts of robbery.⁸⁰ In Ollendorf and environs, the Russians took almost everything ‘that was not nailed or screwed down’.⁸¹ Food demands were also often excessive.⁸² The Kalteneber

⁷³ J. Steinhoff et al (eds.), p. 474, see also pp. 511-512, 518.

⁷⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Breitenholz, p. 135; J. Hackethal, pp. 209-210; A. Schaefer, p. 53.

⁷⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Dieterode, p. 150, also: Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 338, Wüstheuterode, p. 370; cf. E. Babstübner-Peters, p. 32.

⁷⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Geisleden, pp. 166-167.

⁷⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Großbodungen, p. 180, Weidenbach, p. 335.

⁷⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Hundeshagen, p. 242.

⁷⁹ See, in general: W. Tischner, p. 46.

⁸⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Rengelrode, p. 301.

⁸¹ *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, ‘Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)’, Werner R., 20/9/1994.

⁸² *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 201, Kalteneber, p. 249, Lengenfeld/Stein, pp. 279-280, Teistungen, p. 324; cf. the somewhat diplomatic report of the Worbis *Bürgermeister*, pp. 359-362; also: G. Braune (ed.),

priest reported that the population was forced to work in the fields and gather corn and wheat in inclement weather.⁸³ The absence of ‘harassment’ during the American period of occupation was in stark contrast to the Soviet occupation in Lengenfeld/Stein. Despite delivering goods to the Russians, Red Army soldiers often entered houses on their own initiative to demand food, drink and alcohol. Citizens were also assaulted without cause, wedding guests were harried and a ‘certain Nikolai...will live long in the most unpleasant memory’.⁸⁴

The Russians could be brutal too and abductions were common. One man was apprehended on suspicion of anti-communism and sent to the concentration camp at Buchenwald.⁸⁵ He was then summarily deported to Russia where, his son later discovered, he died after just ten weeks internment.⁸⁶ At Lengerfeld/Stein, eight men were taken from their families, two of whom, by June 1946, had not returned.⁸⁷ Such was the prevalence of robbery that youth in Küllstedt set upon and injured three Russian soldiers on 9 July 1945 in the belief that they were Polish malefactors. The following day, in reprisal, the Russians executed nine of the suspected assailants and sent a further nine to the Soviet Union in captivity.⁸⁸

Numerous rapes perpetrated by Red Army personnel were also the cause of much terror.⁸⁹ Rape was a huge issue throughout the SBZ and anywhere from tens of thousands to two million German women were raped in the months before and years after the German defeat.⁹⁰ In fact, everywhere in the Soviet zone there was a strong fear of

p. 166 (Wolfgang B.); *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, ‘Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik (Ollendorf 1933-1953)’, Werner R., 20/9/1994.

⁸³ *Kriegsende...*, Kalteneber, p. 249.

⁸⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Lengenfeld/Stein, p. 280.

⁸⁵ The Russians maintained the Nazi camp as a prison for political prisoners from 1945 to 1949.

⁸⁶ J. Hackethal, p. 211; father and brother imprisoned: K. Meyer-Weyrich, pp. 141-142.

⁸⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Lengenfeld/Stein, p. 280, see also: Lutter/Fürstenhagen, p. 287.

⁸⁸ H. Siebert, pp. 87-90.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁹⁰ On rape in the SBZ see: N. Naimark, pp. 69-140 (for figures: pp. 132-133); in Thuringia: E. Babstübner-Peters, pp. 31-32; B. Andrees, p. 103.

rape such that it was common for German women to live together in mutual support.⁹¹ In Thuringia, a report from the parish of Kleinbartloff reported an instance of rape by Russians and Poles.⁹² In another instance, a Red Army officer was punished for rape.⁹³ The report of one eyewitness stated that rape occurred not in individual, isolated cases but rather was a crime committed on a mass scale and often in public. Hospitals in Eichsfeld treated a number of women for the effects of rape.⁹⁴ Another eyewitness reported that rapes began on the very night of Russian occupation at Hildburghausen.⁹⁵

However, an exhaustive history of medicine and hospitals in Eichsfeld did not note a single rape case, let alone an epidemic. Otherwise, it reported the large-scale care of wounded soldiers and the spread of disease including typhus.⁹⁶ Statements and references alluding to Russian rape are also noticeably absent from church sources and *Bürgermeister* reports from the end of the war. This is perhaps due to a bias in the evidence. As noted, the authors from Eichsfeld were under Soviet occupation at the time they compiled their reports and, in a discussion of rape, they might have been influenced by the fact that the Russian authorities refused to acknowledge that Red Army soldiers were raping German women. As Norman Naimark has shown, the Russians maintained that rapes were being perpetrated by ‘bandits’. All attempts to discuss the problem of rape in public were peremptorily blocked.⁹⁷ The relative absence of rape in the Eichsfeld reports may thus be a result of self-censorship, but it is also possible that fewer women were victims of rape in Thuringia than in other parts of East Germany, such as Berlin-Brandenburg. It should be borne in mind that the problem of rape was at its most intense

⁹¹ M. Dörr, *Durchkommen und Überleben...*, pp. 406ff, 417, 419-420; see also: Perry Biddiscombe, *Werwolf! The History of the National Socialist Guerilla Movement, 1944-1946*, (Cardiff: 1998), p. 281; Jürgen Kleindienst, pp. 34, 116.

⁹² *Kriegsende...*, Kleinbartloff, p. 267; G. Braune (ed.), p. 122 (Frieda J.), p. 166 (Wolfgang B.).

⁹³ *LKAE*, A 930 V, Superintendentur Saalfeld to the LKR, 29/4/46.

⁹⁴ H. Siebert, p. 121.

⁹⁵ G. Albrecht, p. 118.

⁹⁶ M. Kramann, pp. 296-302.

⁹⁷ N. Naimark, pp. 101-105, 138-140.

during the first phases of Soviet occupation in April, May and June of 1945; Thuringia was not, of course, occupied by the Russians until early July.⁹⁸

Despite the fact that the Eichsfeld accounts of American and Soviet occupation contain many similarities, the greater brutality of Russian occupation is occasionally alluded to, albeit in veiled terms. The change in tone was clear in reports from clergy at Uder, Teistungen and Volkerode.⁹⁹ At Teistungen, for example, the American occupation was painted almost as a golden time in comparison to the difficult Russian occupation. Another eyewitness remarked that where the Americans bought or bartered with Ollendorf farmers, the Russians plundered.¹⁰⁰ Dr. Thomas Seidel, who was a vicar in Ollendorf for a period from 1985, recalled that many in his community who had experienced the end of the war felt themselves victims twice over. They had lost the war and were then forced to endure Russian occupation. Forty years after the event, surviving parishioners continued to express regret that the demarcation line had moved in July 1945 and that they had fallen under Soviet government.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of Russian behaviour in Thuringia in the summer of 1945 is that it varied enormously from place to place and from unit to unit. In this respect, as in so many others, local factors were paramount. Different experiences of Soviet occupation naturally elicited differing reactions on the part of the civilian population. The Russians were capable of mercy and generosity in one instance and brutality in the next. For example, an interpreter in Eisenach after the war observed:

A passing woman recognised her husband in a group of captured German Nazis, who were being led [off] to work. In tears, she drew him to her. The Russian sentry asked her what was happening and heard that the imprisoned man was the father of four children. He said with a grin, “Pascholl domoi! Go home!”, but grabbed an innocent bystander and with his rifle butt forced him

⁹⁸ E. Babstübner-Peters, p. 31

⁹⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Teistungen, p. 324, Uder, p. 328, Volkerode, p. 330.

¹⁰⁰ *Privatarchiv Thomas Seidel*, ‘Die Zeitzeugen berichten aus der Ollendorfer Ortschronik, (Ollendorf 1933-1953)’, Werner R., 20/9/94.

¹⁰¹ T. A. Seidel, ‘Befreiung oder Besatzung?...’, p. 39; see also: H. Kreutzer, p. 44.

to take the place of the released man. Protest did not help. The number had to be correct.¹⁰²

This paradox was common in many areas of the SBZ. Whilst rape was widespread and brutal, there were instances where individual Russians intervened and helped. One German woman, for example, warmly thanked a soldier for saving her from rape and murder.¹⁰³ In all, while a number of reports reflect that the behaviour of Red Army personnel was satisfactory and that the initial anxieties of the German population were soon dispelled, other accounts reveal that the brutality of the Russians engendered an enduring sense of fear.

Communities, church life and the occupiers

The key role and intermediary position of the churches in the post-war era was reflected in the demands made by communities on their churches during the last days of the war and the immediate post-war period. The churches offered support and comfort during the traumatic final hours of the war and, once towns and villages had been safely occupied by the Americans, local people flocked to church services in order to thank God for their deliverance. The churches also provided important material care and interceded on behalf of community members with the occupation authorities.

By April 1945, the population of Thuringia, as throughout Germany, was suffering from war exhaustion. Very few Germans wanted to fight to the bitter end and most desired only that the war be concluded as quickly and as peacefully as possible.¹⁰⁴ Many had become disillusioned with Nazism and had come to regard the 'German State' as the 'Nazi State'. The war was no longer seen as a 'German' conflict, but a war that had been

¹⁰² Godiva Kroner, *Kaugummi oder Wodka. Eine Dolmetscherin zwischen zwei Welten*, (Berlin: 1991), p. 35.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ Mathilde Wolff-Möneckeberg in P. Goedde, pp. 61-62; M. Malzahn, pp. 49-52; P. Biddiscombe, pp. 280-281; M. Dörr, *Durchkommen und Überleben...*, pp. 376, 397; Margarete Dörr, *Vertrieben, Ausgebombt, auf sich gestellt, Frauen meistern Kriegs- und Nachkriegsjahre*, (Frankfurt: 1998), pp. 32-33, 45ff, 77.

unleashed by the ‘criminal’ Hitler and his clique.¹⁰⁵ An increasing focus on self and the local community alienated individual Germans from the collective national identity that had been propagated in the National Socialist myth of *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁰⁶ The concern for self and the local community was paramount. These concerns led many toward religion. In the environment of anxiety, the churches offered support and consolation.¹⁰⁷ At Dingelstädt and Heiligenstadt, the entire community gathered in the Catholic Church for services when it was feared that bombers were overhead. In Heiligenstadt, this was sometimes three or four times a day and many repeatedly flocked to church.¹⁰⁸ During an air raid at Dingelstädt, everyone gathered together in the chapel as the priest dispensed absolution and communion as if it were the people’s last hour.¹⁰⁹ At Kella, celebrations for Whit Sunday were observed amidst raging hostilities in the town’s environs; the first communion of the children was ‘moving’ and not forgotten by children and parents alike.¹¹⁰ A ‘great’ number also attended church on the Sunday before the occupation of Wilbich.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the comfort provided by the church was not always able to counteract fears and raise spirits. One statement from Kleinbartloff was telling: ‘The Easter festival came with marvellous spring weather, but of the Easter atmosphere no sign.’¹¹² Elsewhere, at Grossbartloff: ‘So came then 8 April 1945, Whit Sunday. It should be First Communion!

¹⁰⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Ershausen, pp. 161-163; *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 138, Pf. Linz (Gotha) to the LKR, 11/3/1946; *GuH*, 1/11, 7/7/46, ‘Helfende Hände steuern der Not, Vom Hilfswerk der Thüringer Kirche in Eisenach’, Massow, p. 3; Rigobert Wenzel (ed.), *Die Anfangsjahre der CDU in Thüringen und auf dem Eichsfeld (1945-1950)*, (Duderstadt: 2000), pp. 11-13; E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, p. 113; H. Siebert, p. 25; cf. for a socialist view: R. Barthel, M. Fischer, pp. 5-7; see also, in Bremen: H. Müller, “‘Es war der 25. April, als für mich eine Welt zusammenbrach’”, pp. 88ff, 102.

¹⁰⁶ M. Greschat, ‘Kontinuität und Neuanfang...’, p. 86; M. Greschat, ‘Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung...’, p. 99.

¹⁰⁷ See: H. Siebert, p. 18; E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, p. 109; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 21; K. Herbert, p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 191ff.

¹⁰⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Dingelstädt, pp. 152-153, also Breitenholz, pp. 128-129; at Heiligenstadt: H. Siebert, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ *Kriegsende...*, Kella, p. 261, also Wüstheuterode, p. 365.

¹¹¹ *Kriegsende...*, Wilbich, p. 342.

¹¹² *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, pp. 27-28, see also: Kleinbartloff, p. 265; U. Preiß, p. 102.

It was a day of grief and melancholy.¹¹³ Due to the tension created by the imminent American arrival, services at Jüchsen and Wiesenthal/Rhön were suspended.¹¹⁴ Church life was also sometimes inhibited by the physical effects of war. Although churches in most areas of Thuringia were unscathed, in those localities where the fighting had been intense there was often substantial damage to church buildings. In such instances, it was difficult to hold traditional services. For example, it was impossible on rainy days to hold church services at the Catholic chapel at Alach. The local priest recalled that the wind blew the mass book about the place and extinguished the candles.¹¹⁵ Other Catholic churches were damaged at Kefferhausen, Struth, Siemerode and Nordhausen. The Protestant churches at Ohrdruff, Volkstedt, Harpersdorf and Oberlödla also suffered some ruin.¹¹⁶ Church buildings in Erfurt too, including the magnificent St. Marien and adjacent St. Severi, were hit in the course of repeated air raids from 1944 and artillery bombardments in 1945.¹¹⁷ Most churches, nonetheless, especially in rural parishes, escaped virtually undamaged and church life was not inhibited by the physical effects of war.¹¹⁸

According to the Eichsfeld reports, the dominant reaction to the end of hostilities in Thuringia in the middle of April was relief, coupled with a sense of gratitude that physical damage had been slight and casualties had been low. Many Christians ascribed their good fortune in surviving the war to divine intervention and, in Catholic areas, to

¹¹³ *Kriegsende...*, Großbartloff, p. 174.

¹¹⁴ W. Meyer, p. 85; U. Preiß, p. 102.

¹¹⁵ *BEA*, Stellenakten Alach, 'Bericht', Pater Benedikt, 10/4/1950.

¹¹⁶ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Heiligenstadt, 24/10/45, 'Bericht', Eisenach, 26/10/45; *Kriegsende...*, Kefferhausen, p. 252ff.

¹¹⁷ *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche Kriegssache 1939-1947, 'Bericht', Freusberg, 22/4/45; *BEA*, C II a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Verzeichnis der katholischen Kirchen', 11/7/45; see also: *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche Kriegssache 1939-1947, 'Bericht', Freusberg, 18/12/1944; *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche Kriegssache 1939-1947, Freusberg to the BGVF, 25/1/45; *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Erfurt, 26/10/1945, 'Bericht', Heiligenstadt, 24/10/45.

¹¹⁸ For example: *Kriegsende...*, Beuren, p. 111, Birkungen, p. 118, Bischofferode, pp. 118-119, Bodenrode, p. 119; on the other hand, see: Kefferhausen, pp. 252-255, 257-259, Leinefelde, p. 271.

the intercession of Mary and the saints.¹¹⁹ Therefore, while the exacting circumstances of the final months and weeks of the war had often made it impossible to hold church services, post-war conditions fostered a revival in religious observance and popularity.¹²⁰ The war was no longer the people's concern. There was the enthusiastic prompt resumption of church events, festivals and processions. The day after the occupation of Heiligenstadt, for instance, the 50 year anniversary of the St. Marien church choir was celebrated. Elsewhere, the *Fronleichnamsprozession* (the centrepiece of the Catholic *Fronleichnam* celebration of Jesus Christ's bodily presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist), was celebrated in most places through the acquiescence of the American authorities.¹²¹ Church services could be held without restriction, the annual pilgrimage to the Hülfsenberg was permitted, clergy were able to carry out their pastoral duties and the churches were permitted to mobilise their resources for charity and community work. At Bickenriede, just days after the occupation on 4 April 1945, Whit Sunday and First Communion were reported as having been celebrated with 'especial feeling'.¹²² At Brietenholz, Holungen and Mackenrode, the passing of the war removed restraints and initiated a popular church life.¹²³ At Teistungen, the entire community took part in the dedication to Mary on Easter Sunday.¹²⁴ Even after the arrival of the Russians, church life continued to blossom. This is reflected above all in reports from Streb, Freusberg and Mitzenheim in October 1945, which revealed that almost all aspects of church life were

¹¹⁹ U. Preiß, p. 105; F. Brendel, p. 130; *Kriegsende...*, Birkungen, p. 117, Breitenholz, p. 132, Effelder, p. 158, Geismar, pp. 169, 170, Heiligenstadt, p. 195, Hohengandern, p. 235, Kallmerode, p. 245, Kirchworbis, p. 264, Küllstedt, p. 270, Mackenrode, p. 287, Rengelrode, p. 301, Rüstungen, p. 305, Wiesenfeld, p. 341, Zella, p. 375. Instances of 'Gott sei Dank': Büttstedt, p. 148, Geismar, pp. 169, 170, Hohengandern, p. 235, Kallmerode, p. 245, Kalteneber, pp. 246, 247, Kefferhausen, p. 253.

¹²⁰ For examples of restricted services see: W. Meyer, p. 85; U. Preiß, p. 102; *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Memorial for fallen, 2/11/1944; *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Anweisungen', Freusberg, 19/9/1945; *BEA*, BGVF bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht des Paters Bernardin Bieling ofm über seine Seelsorge in Mühlhausen/Thüringen vom 13. November [1944] bis 26. September 1945', 18/10/45.

¹²¹ R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 75; H. Siebert, p. 28; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 195-196, Kalteneber, p. 249, Weißenborn-Lüderode, p. 337.

¹²² *Kriegsende...*, Bickenriede, p. 115.

¹²³ *Kriegsende...*, Breitenholz, p. 131, Holungen, pp. 237, 239, Mackenrode, p. 288.

¹²⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Teistungen, p. 321.

allowed free expression by the new occupiers (see chapter two). In general terms, religious life was vibrant in the immediate post-war era.

The churches also helped the population in more material ways. As refugees flooded into Thuringia, the churches responded to their needs and were at the forefront of efforts to offer support. The post-war period was the ‘great hour’ of the Catholic aid organisation, *Caritas*, and its Protestant counterpart, *Hilfswerk*. Both were extremely active in the immediate post-war period.¹²⁵ Churchmen met refugees upon their entrance into Thuringia and helped with food, shelter and counsel as they could. The Catholic Church, in particular, also sought to preserve local communities and priests interceded for former Nazis who had been removed from office in the immediate post-war period.¹²⁶ The clergyman at Kirchgandern spoke out in support of the *Bürgermeister* and the local Nazi party boss on account of their considerate conduct toward the Church during the war.¹²⁷ In Grossbartloff, a plea was made on behalf of the local *Bürgermeister* whom it was claimed had been pressured into assuming the position of the regional Nazi party leader, but who nonetheless had remained a ‘good’ Catholic.¹²⁸ Despite his good service to the community, the *Bürgermeister* was, the local teacher claimed, a scapegoat ‘for the sins of the [Nazi] government’.¹²⁹ The priest at St. Crucis in Erfurt too appealed against the arrest of a former parishioner in Worbis (Eichsfeld). The man was reportedly a zealous Christian and had made no effort to propagate the Nazi worldview.¹³⁰ In all, the churches sought to care for parishioners in whatever way necessary, whether in the form of material aid or intercession in early denazification measures.

¹²⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, pp. 202-204.

¹²⁶ Damian van Melis, ‘Der katholische Episkopat und die Entnazifizierung’, in: *Siegerin in Trümmern: die Rolle der katholischen Kirche in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, eds. J. Köhler, D. van Melis, (Stuttgart: 1998), pp. 66-67.

¹²⁷ *Kriegsende...*, Kirchgandern, p. 264, also see: Birkenriede, p. 116, Großbartloff, pp. 175-176, Holungen, p. 237, Kella, p. 262, Kreuzebra, p. 269, Rustenfelde, p. 308.

¹²⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Großbartloff, p. 176.

¹²⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Großbartloff, p. 178, also Neuendorf, p. 294, Teistungen, pp. 323-324, Wilbich, pp. 344-345.

¹³⁰ *BEA*, C II a16, SMA Thüringen, St. Crucis (Erfurt) to the American occupation authorities, 4/5/45.

As no other mass institutions survived the war, the influence of the churches grew to the extent that they assumed a vital role in the immediate post-war period.¹³¹ The pressures and demands from the population at the end of the war revealed the importance of the churches. As the conflict drew to a close, anxiety peaked in some places and inhibited the holding of regular church services, but, in other locales, the Christian Church stood as a beacon of hope and support. The conclusion of the war was generally accompanied by a flood of relief and gratitude, and the population required the churches to undertake their usual services. These ceremonies were normally well attended and performed with great vigour (the actual extent of the religious revival in 1945 is further discussed in chapter four below). The churches also sought to preserve local communities through material care and intercessions. The renewed faith of many people in 1945 gave the churches popular authority to mediate between the demands of the population and those of the occupation forces.

¹³¹ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, pp. 11-12.

2: The churches and the secular authorities, 1945-1948

Between 1945 and 1948 the political, social and economic life of the Soviet zone became more centralised under the direction of the KPD/SED.¹ In particular, the KPD/SED tightened their control in the areas that they deemed most important, such as politics and the economy. In politics, by 1948 the SED had successfully neutralised the power of the other two parties in the Soviet zone, the Liberals (LDPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU). The most effective instrument of control was the ‘antifascist-democratic bloc’ which was supervised by KPD/SED members and was intended to curtail the independence of mass organisations and to co-ordinate them with the socialist state.² The establishment of the German Economic Commission (DWK) headed by communist functionaries also gave the SED significant control over the economy.³ On the other hand, the control of the KPD/SED was not as immediate and direct over less important areas such as agriculture and the legal system. This was largely because of general chaotic conditions and a lack of trained communist personnel.⁴

¹ Mark Allinson, ‘Popular Opinion’, in: *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71*, p. 96 ; J. Foitzik, pp. 55-57; Peter Grieder, ‘The leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany under Ulbricht’, in: *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71*, pp. 22-24.

² M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 15, 23-38; Hörst Dähn, ‘Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED’, in: *Erobert oder befreit? Deutschland im internationalen Kräftefeld und die sowjetische Besatzungszone (1945/46)*, eds. H. Mehringer, M. Schwartz et al, (Munich: 1998), p. 148; Thresia Bauer, ‘Krise und Wandel der Blockpolitik und Parteineugründungen 1948’, in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, pp. 65-83, esp. pp. 72-79; M. Dennis, pp. 20, 28; G. Pritchard, p. 58.

³ André Steiner, ‘Die deutsche Wirtschaftskommission – ein ordnungspolitisches Machtinstrument?’, in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, pp. 85-105, esp. pp. 87-93, 105; M. Dennis, pp. 42-43.

⁴ Chaotic conditions in agriculture: A. Bauerkämper, pp. 261-262; inadequate personnel in agriculture: Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-roots. The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65*, (Hampshire: 2000) p. 27ff; there was also much hostility to the SED amongst many farmers (A. Bauerkämper, pp. 247-252) and 1948 represented a radicalisation with a more hard-line SED agricultural policy (A. Bauerkämper, pp. 253ff, 266); see also: Jonathan Osmond, ‘From Junker estate to co-operative farm: East German agrarian society 1945-61’, in: *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71*, pp. 134-138; there was also inadequate personnel in

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the position of the Thuringian churches. In particular, how did the churches fit into this framework of incomplete communist power? Did the Russians and their German socialist allies attempt to bring the churches under direct control? The American occupation lasted only three months and the Russians continued their predecessors' liberal church policy. In fact, despite the fundamental ideological differences between communism and Christianity, which suggested the likelihood of a KPD/SED led co-ordination of the churches, this did not occur.⁵ The main conclusion of this chapter is that the Thuringian churches enjoyed significant freedom of religious belief and movement, which allowed them to establish a privileged position in society, despite incursions by German communists. These interventions were often restrained by the SMATh, which was careful not to antagonise the churches. This is surprising given the close relationship between the Soviet authorities and the KPD/SED. In order to explore the significance of this tolerance, there is a need to investigate the relationship of Russian church policy in Thuringia to Soviet policy in other areas and also overarching *Deutschlandpolitik*.

The churches and the American occupiers

Church interaction with the occupying powers – the Americans from early to mid-April 1945 and the Soviets from early-July – dictated church life. In the initial phase of occupation, American policy was shaped by a concern to consolidate Allied government over the defeated German population through the imposition of law and order. At the first meeting between the occupation authorities and church representatives, the American commandant of Erfurt, Captain Baer, stated: 'We have taken over the power of government and are here as victors. We bear, however, no desire for revenge, but we also

justice system: Hermann Wentker, 'Das Jahr 1948 als Auftakt zu Zentralisierung, Politisierung und Sowjetisierung des Justizwesens', in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, p. 152; from 1947/1948, there were increased attempts at centralisation by the SED (H. Wentker, pp. 149, 155-157), but these efforts were not entirely successful until 1952/1953 (H. Wentker, pp. 165, 167).

⁵ Rudolf Mau, *Eingebunden in den Realsozialismus? Die evangelische Kirche als Problem der SED*, (Göttingen: 1994), pp. 15-20; M. Thomas, p. 210; M. Allinson, 'Popular Opinion', p. 87.

have no friendship and we do not wish to have any friendship.’⁶ Full religious freedom for the churches was however promised.⁷ Church services resumed with the blessing of the Military Government and in Erfurt American troops attended church, albeit on reserved pews.⁸

Reports submitted to the *Regierungsrat* in October 1945 allow an overview of the churches before, during and after the war. There was initially some friction between the churches and the American occupiers. At Erfurt, a motion to exclude priests on pastoral care duties from the curfew order was rejected, while the *Fronleichnamsprozession* was forbidden.⁹ Initial restrictions on the teaching of the religious curriculum and prohibitions on practice sessions for church choirs were also controversial because of their ostensible incongruity with the promise of religious freedom.¹⁰ Captain Baer explained to church officials: ‘Thuringia was a bastion of National Socialism and everything must be forbidden that can be utilised in its reemergence.’¹¹ Until the political relationship of the priesthood to Nazism during the Third Reich was fully understood, therefore, large-scale meetings were banned and there was a moratorium on religious instruction.¹² Still, by October, much had improved for the Catholic Church, in comparison to the Nazi period and early occupation restrictions, and services were again freely observed, religious festivals were permitted and Catholic kindergartens were reopened.¹³ The *Bischöflicher Kommissarius* at Heiligenstadt, Josef Streb, reported that the Americans returned

⁶ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, ‘Niederschrift’, 1/5/45.

⁷ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, American occupation authorities in Erfurt to Freusberg, 12/6/45; see also: T. A. Seidel, ‘Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse...’, p. 113.

⁸ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, ‘Niederschrift’, 1/5/45.

⁹ BEA, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche Kriegssache 1939-1947, ‘Bericht’, 22/4/45; ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, ‘Bericht’, Erfurt, 26/10/1945; see also: BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the BGVF, 13/6/45; BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg and others (nine) to the American occupation authorities in Erfurt, 2/6/45; W. Tischner, p. 65.

¹⁰ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to Regierungsrat Dr. Pallinger, 5/6/45; BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg and others (nine) to the American occupation authorities in Erfurt, 2/6/45.

¹¹ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, ‘Memorandum’, 28/4/45.

¹² BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, ‘Niederschrift’, 1/5/45.

¹³ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, ‘Bericht’, Erfurt, 26/10/1945; BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the American occupation authorities in Erfurt, 2/6/45.

freedoms taken from the Church during the Nazi period including the reopening of schools and kindergartens.¹⁴ Like his Catholic counterparts, the head of the TeK, Moritz Mitzenheim, regarded the arrival of the Americans as a liberation.¹⁵

The churches and the Russians

In their religious policies, the Russians toed the general line of the resolutions of the European Advisory Committee (EAC) of 24 November 1944, the Potsdam Conference and the Allied Religious Affairs Committee of August 1945.¹⁶ These guaranteed general freedom of religion apart from state intervention. There were two major reasons the Russians granted the churches independence. Most importantly, church autonomy was in accordance with overall Russian *Deutschlandpolitik*. In 1945 and 1946, the Soviet authorities had made no long-term decision on the fate of East Germany and sought to create a 'balance of interests' which emphasised immediate economic goals, such as extracting reparations and acquiring critically important stakes in the industrially advanced Rhein and Ruhr regions. The Soviets had not, at this stage, ruled out the possibility of cooperation with the Western Allies.¹⁷ In adopting the Allied policy of religious freedom for the churches, therefore, the Russians kept their options open and had greater political freedom of movement.¹⁸ Even though the Stalinisation of the SED in 1947 and 1948 increasingly drew the SBZ toward socialism, the Soviet authorities still had not abandoned the possibility of a united Germany and maintained their policy of non-interference in the churches as an extension of overall *Deutschlandpolitik* (see

¹⁴ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Heiligenstadt, 24/10/1945.

¹⁵ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Eisenach, 26/10/1945; BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Niederschrift', 1/5/45.

¹⁶ H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', pp. 148-150; see, on the interaction between the SMAD and the Church in general: Horst Dähn, *Konfrontation oder Kooperation? Das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1980*, (Opladen: 1982); T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 252-262.

¹⁷ H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 154.

¹⁸ Gerhard Besier, 'Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang', in: *Erobert oder befreit? Deutschland im internationalen Kräftefeld und die sowjetische Besatzungszone (1945/46)*, p. 135; H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', pp. 161-162.

further below, pp. 70-74). Secondly, the Russians recognised that the churches could be useful allies and more than willing collaborators in the reconstruction of the zone.¹⁹

There was religious freedom in Thuringia as the SMATh continued the conciliatory American policy toward the churches. The two most salient aspects of the relationship between the churches and the SMATh were the common willingness to enter dialogue and the unwillingness of the Russians to alienate the churches.²⁰ From the outset, at a meeting with the Russian authorities in Erfurt, Freusberg and Prosenior Breithaupt (Landeskirche Sachsen) declared their loyalty to the occupiers and they all agreed to pursue a policy of 'collaboration based on trust'.²¹ The churches, of course, were required to abjure Nazism.²² The freedom in church life offered by the Russians was welcomed by all.²³ At Geisladen, for example, the *Bürgermeister* reported in July 1946 that, from the outset of Russian occupation, services and processions had been held in the 'usual, time-honored' fashion.²⁴ The LKR report of October 1945 also thanked the Russian head of civil affairs in Thuringia, Major-General Ivan Kolesnitschenko, for his cooperative attitude.²⁵ The initial accommodating position of the SMATh endured, despite some setbacks and disagreements, beyond 1948.

¹⁹ Natalja P. Timofejewa, 'Deutschland zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft: Die Politik der SMAD auf dem Gebiet von Kultur, Wissenschaft und Bildung 1945-1949. Einleitung', in: *Die Politik der Sowjetischen Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD): Kultur, Wissenschaft und Bildung 1945-1949*, eds. H. Möller, A. O. Tschubarjan, (Munich: 2005), pp. 13-15; H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 154.

²⁰ See: C. Koch, pp. 259-360; T. A. Seidel, 'Deutsch-christliche Hypothek und Neuordnungskompromisse...', p. 114; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 99-105; *GuH*, 2/8, 23/2/47, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p.1; *GuH*, 2/10, 9/3/47, 'Aus der Thüringer evangelischen Kirche', p. 3; Josef Pilvousek, 'Die Geschichte der katholischen Kirche im Eichsfeld', in: *Kirchliche Kunst im Eichsfeld*, ed. H.-J. Durstewitz, (Duderstadt: 1997), p. 13.

²¹ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Besprechung zwischen dem Kommandanten der Militärregierung (Russen) und den Vertretern der Religionsgesellschaften', 12/7/45.

²² See, in general: M. Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', pp. 11-12.

²³ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Kurze Darstellung des derzeitigen Standes der kath. Kirche in Altthüringen', 26/10/45.

²⁴ *Kriegsende...*, Geisladen, p. 167.

²⁵ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Eisenach, 26/10/1945.

The conciliatory policy may be seen in Russian responses to church applications for the use of media. Both churches sought to publish pamphlets and newspapers to distribute to their parishioners. The Catholic Church sought to offset the effect of fewer church services, as a result of a lack of chapels in many Thuringian towns, by distributing a Sunday pamphlet. In his application, Freusberg proposed that the pamphlet was to exclude politics and was to be 'purely religious' in character.²⁶ The Church sought the permission of both the SMATh and the office of the Minister President of Thuringia. Despite receiving the initial acquiescence of Kolesnitschenko, the pamphlet had not appeared by mid-1946 due to a number of difficulties and the licence was revoked.²⁷ Otherwise, mass texts, children's confession and communion sermons and short catechisms were printed with Russian approval.²⁸

As for the Protestant Church, the printing of books for religious instruction including the catechism, liturgy, bible verses, hymns and prayers was also permitted.²⁹ The Church, in addition, received permission to publish handbooks for pastors although, due to paper dearth, publication was inhibited until 1947.³⁰ The paper shortage and other organisational problems also delayed the first issue of the TeK's weekly newspaper, *Glaube und Heimat*.³¹ The first edition, since printing was suspended on 1 June 1941, appeared on 21 April 1946 although two articles were cut by the Russian censor. One was rejected because it proclaimed a 'rallying call to the reconstruction of the destroyed churches', which was inappropriate as 'there are no destroyed churches'. The other article was censured because it stated that 'the unity of the German people can only be achieved through the gospel'.³² Permission to print nonetheless was ongoing and publication

²⁶ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, Freusberg to the Minister President of Thuringia, 20/11/45.

²⁷ W. Tischner, pp. 539-545.

²⁸ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über Seelsorge,' Sömmerda to the BGVF, 4/10/1945; cf. some difficulties: H. Siebert, pp. 222-224.

²⁹ EZAB, 2/148, A837, 27/11/45.

³⁰ LKAE, A 155, 59, Mitzenheim to the SMATh, 6/11/45, request approved, 12/11/45; LKAE, A 155, 59, Mitzenheim to Pf. Waldmann, 2/9/46.

³¹ GuH, 1/2, 5/5/46, 'Am Fuße der Wartburg', Superintendent H. Elle (Jena), p.2.

³² LKAE, A 156, 60, Pf. Waldmann to Mitzenheim, 12/4/46.

continued. In fact, the print run was even permitted to rise from 5,000 to 10,000 in 1947, although inquiries for a further increase in early 1948 were refused on the basis of the paper shortage. The TeK had to make do with 10,000 copies for a church numbering over 1,500,000 members in 1,500 communities.³³

There were, however, frictions between individual churches and local Soviet forces. There were many complaints about everyday Russian conduct. A distinction must be made between SMATh policy and the conduct of individual Red Army troops who engaged in harassment, robbery and rape.³⁴ Intentional delays of churchmen – even in possession of valid passes – were often punctuated with anticlerical abuse and physical assault.³⁵ Amongst other things, Streb's report of October 1945 on the Catholic Church in Nordhausen, Mühlhausen and Eichsfeld strongly disapproved of the deliberate obstruction of pilgrimages.³⁶ Assaults and burglaries by drunken Russian soldiers were other realities of the occupation, and church buildings and clergy were not spared.³⁷ Mitzenheim himself was held at gunpoint while Red Army soldiers raided the head offices of the TeK at Eisenach and took a radio, a blanket, a curtain (!), articles of clothing and writing materials.³⁸

³³ *LKAE*, A 156, 60, Dr. Schanze to the SMATh (Major Babenko), 3/2/47; *LKAE*, A 156, 60, Mitzenheim to Wilhelm Lotz, 6/3/48; *GuH*, 2/36, 7/9/47, 'Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?', p. 2; the estimated readership was approximately '13,000-15,000' readers: *GuH*, 2/40, 5/10/47, 'Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder', Schröter (Altenburg), p. 2; also see: *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, 'Nochmals: "Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder"?' Pf. Waldmann, p. 2.

³⁴ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Johann Steinbach (Chairman of the Thuringian CDU) to the BGVF, 10/9/1946.

³⁵ *LKAE*, A 240 IV, 86, Superintendent Gera to the Russian commandant at Gera, 11/9/45; *LKAE*, A 930 V, 1, Pf. Ohland (Meiningen) to the LKR, 7/1/46; there were also difficulties in crossing the zonal frontiers: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Johannes Dietz (Bishop of Fulda) to Sondershausen, 20/5/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Pf. Alfons Smaczny to the BGVF, 29/7/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen', Freusberg, 1/7/46; see also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, Maximilian Kaller, bishop of Ermland, to BGVF, undated; *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Chronik der Würzburger Diaspora in Süd-Thüringen, Zusammengetragen von Pfarrer in Ruhe,' Robert Kümmert, 1983, p. 8.

³⁶ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Heiligenstadt, 24/10/45; cf. *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Niederschrift', 3/10/45.

³⁷ *LKAE*, A 930 V, 1, Pf. Bretlschneider (Wölfis) to the LKR, 18/3/46; *LKAE*, A 930 I, 11, Lagefeld to the LKR, 7/11/45; *LKAE*, A 930 V, G. Bartsch (Lagefeld) to Kreiskirchenamt Weimar, 22/3/46.

³⁸ *LKAE*, A 930 I, 16, Mitzenheim to Kolesnitschenko, 20/11/45.

Often the church authorities responded to these clashes by appealing to the highest levels of the SMATh. More often than not, the Soviet leadership heeded church complaints and sought to assuage the conflict.³⁹ The LKR, for example, protested against the occupation of church buildings and houses and most of these were returned by the end of 1945 with only a few exceptions.⁴⁰ At Spahl, church protestations about the disruption of a Catholic procession by Red Army soldiers occasioned a prompt apology.⁴¹ When Mitzenheim complained about the obstruction of pastors who were performing their pastoral duties, Kolesnitschenko promised to initiate an investigation.⁴² When he objected to the confiscation of bank safes, Kolesnitschenko ordered their return.⁴³ At the behest of the TeK, a Russian officer was also tried and punished for rape.⁴⁴ After a Russian commandant of 'a Thuringian city', in cooperation with the local police, prohibited public church gatherings, the personal objection of Mitzenheim persuaded Kolesnitschenko to repudiate the 'inappropriate' decree.⁴⁵ Lastly, a fine imposed upon the TeK in early 1948 by a local Russian officer for staging unauthorised youth events was repaid in full by the SMATh.⁴⁶

In Eichsfeld, problems between lower level Russian occupation forces and the Catholic Church were also eased by the conciliatory attitude of the SMATh. When the SED and local Russian troops intervened in Catholic affairs and discriminated against the Church, Kolesnitschenko heeded church complaints. The book of one priest, Heinz Siebert, *Das Eichsfeld unterm Sowjetstern*, is a litany of remonstrations against the Russians and their German communist 'minions' and he describes conflict with the Soviet occupying forces

³⁹ See: *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, reports (three) from October 1945.

⁴⁰ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Eisenach, 26/10/1945.

⁴¹ *BFA*, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Spahl, 29/9/45; similarly in Eichsfeld: H. Siebert, pp. 116-117, 119, 124.

⁴² *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Niederschrift', 3/10/45.

⁴³ *EZAB*, 2/148, K340, 20/11/45.

⁴⁴ *LKAE*, A 930 V, Superintendentur Saalfeld to the LKR, 29/4/46.

⁴⁵ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 31/47, 27/11/47.

⁴⁶ *LKAE*, 930 V, 45, Mitzenheim to Superintendent Mälzer, 20/4/48.

as constant.⁴⁷ Siebert was a priest in Heiligenstadt during the post-war period and he fled to Fulda from the GDR in 1981. The book was published posthumously in 1992. He wrote:

The struggle, which world communism has announced and which we have observed from the small territory of Eichsfeld in the first years after 1945, has a deeply religious character. It is a struggle in which ultimately communism, as militant pseudo-religion, and the Church, above all in its Marian focus, stand diametrically opposed as irreconcilable enemies.⁴⁸

While it may be that Siebert's representation of Eichsfeld in the SBZ was tainted somewhat by his experiences in the more repressive environment of the GDR, his secretary, Heinrich Siebert, corroborated some of the conflicts. Heinrich Siebert reported, in June 1946, that the difficulties faced by the Heiligenstadt churches in the immediate post-war period encumbered church life and were primarily caused by the activities of the KPD.⁴⁹ Another (anonymous) church report stated that there were interrogations of the Eichsfeld clergy and that many school teachers were hostile to Christianity. In the words of one apparently popular saying on the oppressive atmosphere fostered by local Soviet troops and SED members: 'Lord God, send us the fifth Reich; the fourth is the same as the third!'⁵⁰ According to the report, the hand of the Eichsfeld SED, in collusion with individual Russian units, was active to the extent that 'the goal of the Russians and the SED is clear: the Bolshevisation of Germany'.⁵¹ Such was the tyranny in Eichsfeld that the clergy and population believed that the repression they experienced locally was general Soviet policy throughout Germany. In spite of the local conflict, however, the Catholic Church often prevailed when it complained to the highest Russian authorities in Thuringia. When Streb, for instance, threatened to inform Kolesnitschenko about the

⁴⁷ On the other hand, friendly relations: R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 74; W. Tischner, p. 46.

⁴⁸ H. Siebert, p. 251.

⁴⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, pp. 204, 207, 209.

⁵⁰ BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46.

⁵¹ BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46; cf. C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 143; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 208.

decision of the Russian commandant in Heiligenstadt to ban the *Leidensprozession* on Palm Sunday 1946, the commandant backed down. In response to another complaint, the Heiligenstadt Soviet authorities retracted a ban on youth work and, furthermore, several occupied church buildings were returned at Kolesnitschenko's command.⁵² That Kolesnitschenko countermanded the decrees of the regional Russian commander in Eichsfeld reflected the presence of 'rogue' elements in the SMATh who did not act in accordance with the official policy of tolerance. There was little hostility between the highest Soviet and church authorities, communication was open and the Russians heeded church grievances.⁵³

The three-way relationship between the churches, the German communists and the Russians

While Russian policy sought to minimise frictions, there was conflict between the churches and German secular authorities which were, in the post-war period, often under the firm influence of the KPD/SED. The ultimate goal of the KPD/SED was the establishment of socialist society in which religion, as the 'opiate of the people', would wither away.⁵⁴ This was, however, in 1945, very much a long-term goal and in the aftermath of the war the KPD, and later the SED, elected on tactical and strategic grounds not to oppose the churches. Church policy was accordingly shaped by conciliatory SMAD policy.⁵⁵ The foundation document of the SED, for instance, acknowledged traditional democratic rights including religious freedom.⁵⁶ In fact, the churches were 'welcomed' as partners, but only so long as they remained loyal and until communist

⁵² BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 210.

⁵³ In general, see: W. Tischner, p. 65.

⁵⁴ H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 148; on the relationship of socialism to the churches: R. Mau, *Eingebunden in den Realsozialismus?...*, (Göttingen: 1994), p. 15ff; Ehrhart Neubert, 'Kirchenpolitik', in *DDR-Geschichte in Dokumenten*, ed. M. Judt, (Berlin: 1997), pp. 363-364.

⁵⁵ F. Hartweg (ed.), pp. 42-43; H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 154.

⁵⁶ F. Hartweg (ed.), p. 15ff.

power had been stabilised.⁵⁷ The motives of the communist leadership in treating the churches with kid gloves mirrored those of the SMAD: to recruit the churches to the project of the reconstruction of public life. In any case, such was the popular support that the churches possessed, the KPD/SED could not have subsumed the churches even had it wanted to.⁵⁸

Despite the shared policy of tolerance toward the churches, within a few months of the end of the war clear differences emerged between the KPD and the SMAD.⁵⁹ Conflicts between state and church authorities in Thuringia throughout the period 1945 to 1948 reflected this break. The Arnstadt police, for example, banned tithe collections by the local Catholic Church, which responded with considerable protest.⁶⁰ There was also friction between the Catholic community at Ichstedt and the local socialist *Bürgermeister* who had confiscated the vacant priest's house and left the incoming priest without a dwelling. The *Bürgermeister* pointed out that the house was occupied by refugees and that the new priest had no claim on the house.⁶¹ There was conflict between the churches and the Thuringian Youth Office (Jugendamt) and the Thuringian Re-settlers Office (Umsiedleramt), both of which conducted themselves with a 'Nazi-like inebriation with power'.⁶² In Eichsfeld, the SED intervened to supervise church services on Sundays and also behaved, according to Catholic observers, in a manner reminiscent of the Nazi era.⁶³

⁵⁷ H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', pp. 159, 161; see also: F. Hartweg (ed.), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸ M. Thomas, p. 212.

⁵⁹ G. Besier, 'Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang', p. 122; H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 156; cf. on the independence of the SED: J. Foitzik, p. 57.

⁶⁰ BEA, Stellenakten, Arnstadt, Oberregierungsrat to Police (Weimar), 28/7/47.

⁶¹ BEA, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Bad Frankenhausen to the Ichstedt Bürgermeister, 3/9/46, Ichstedt pastorate to Erfurt, 21/9/46; cf. *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/866/46-47, Langenleuba-Niederhain to Freusberg, 27/9/46.

⁶² BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorgestelle Bad Salza (December 1945 to July 1946)', Pf. Stasch to the BGVP, 19/7/46.

⁶³ BFA, BGVP, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46.

In the event of conflict with German socialists, however, the churches again largely prevailed. For example, attempts by local communists to limit church youth groups and events in Thuringia failed. One device of the SED to exercise greater control over youth was the establishment of the Free German Youth (FDJ) in March 1946. Although the so-called *Integrationsphase* of SED youth policy was largely conciliatory toward the churches until 1948/1949, from the very outset the churches understood the threat of the FDJ to the very existence of religious groups.⁶⁴ The Catholic and evangelical authorities rejected the ‘total claim’ of the FDJ and continued to hold their own youth events. Such was the power of the Catholic groups in Eichsfeld that, although the FDJ attempted to co-ordinate them with the help of the Russian commander in Heiligenstadt and the appointment of a Catholic to a leadership position in the FDJ in December 1946, a ban on church youth work was repealed. Streb himself insisted on the groups’ continued independence.⁶⁵ The *Junge Gemeinde* (JG) of the TeK also maintained its autonomy and continued to hold events.⁶⁶ As noted above, a fine imposed on the TeK for an unauthorised *Junge Gemeinde* event was repaid in full by the SMATH.⁶⁷ German communists also attempted to replace the Catholic and Protestant Train Station Mission (Bahnhofsmission) with the socialist *Volkssolidarität* movement. This was a direct attack on the churches’ self-perceptions as institutions that provided for all the needs of the community. The attempt failed and was, predictably, met with outrage as ‘an intolerable attack’ on the freedom of the Christian Church.⁶⁸

Other communist groups and individuals disrupted religious instruction in various localities.⁶⁹ In the main, again, when the churches objected, the local socialists were

⁶⁴ C. Koch, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁵ W. Tischner, pp. 329, 339, 342; *Kriegsende...*, Heiligenstadt, p. 210.

⁶⁶ See: C. Koch, p. 359, conflict in the context of the GDR: pp. 284ff, 361.

⁶⁷ *LKAE*, 930 V, 45, Mitzenheim to Superintendent Mälzer, 20/4/48.

⁶⁸ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 79/866/22-23, Freusberg and Pf. Mebus to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/10/46; cf. in general, good relations: G. Niemczik, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁹ See: *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, ‘Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld’, 14/8/46; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 153ff. On the importance of education to the SED see: R. Mau, *Eingebunden in den Realsozialismus?...*, p. 26.

forced to back down. At Weimar, for example, a history teacher told his students: ‘Jesus could not [possibly] have lived. There are lies or only legends in the bible. There is no God, for otherwise a war would not have been allowed.’⁷⁰ The LKR in response lodged a formal complaint, which was upheld by the authorities. An attempted ban on the singing of Christmas songs was overturned when the churches protested.⁷¹ Mitzenheim described the ban as Nazi-like and a contravention of the SED’s proclamation of religious freedom that would inevitably bring the children into moral conflict.⁷² The LKR also filed charges against a teacher in Thränitz for slander against the Church. During a musical and theatrical performance by the children, the accused allegedly insulted the Christian Church by ridiculing Sunday services. The charge was withdrawn, however, when the teacher made a formal apology.⁷³

In addition to the expression of anti-church sentiments and intrusions by local communists, there was also an attempt at a *Land* level to ban religious instruction altogether. This conflict appears to have been more pronounced in Thuringia than elsewhere in the SBZ.⁷⁴ At a meeting with Kolesnitschenko, Catholic and Protestant churchmen claimed that the goal of Christian community must be the confessional school and religious education.⁷⁵ As a result, the churches remonstrated against the actions of German communists in the Office for People’s Education (LfV).⁷⁶ By October 1945, Catholic private schools in the Erfurt area had not yet reopened and recently established schools were prohibited from religious teaching by the LfV. The LfV also moved to

⁷⁰ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/119, the LKR (Mitzenheim) to the Thuringian Minister President, 30/12/47; cf. another complaint: *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/128, the LKR to Thuringian Minister President, 7/8/48.

⁷¹ *EZAB*, 4/698, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 18/12/46, 6/1/47; *EZAB*, 4/698, the office of the Thuringian Minister President to Mitzenheim, 19/12/46.

⁷² *EZAB*, 4/698, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 18/12/46.

⁷³ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/118, Oberstaatsanwalt (Gera) to the Thuringian Minister President, 4/11/47; cf. *BEA*, Stellenakten, Bleicherode, Grundschule Bleicherode to Kreisbildungsamt Nordhausen, 15/12/48.

⁷⁴ H. Dähn, ‘Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED’, pp. 158-159; see, in general: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 146-165.

⁷⁵ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, ‘Niederschrift’, 3/10/45.

⁷⁶ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, ‘Bericht’, Eisenach, 26/10/1945; in general see: W. Tischner, pp. 259-260.

assume supervision over the schools.⁷⁷ The LKR viewed the LfV's decision not to return certain kindergartens as illegal and a throwback to Nazi policy.⁷⁸ The churches moreover disputed the policy of the LfV in seeking religious neutrality and preventing the Christian influencing of children. According to the decree of the LfV of 7 September 1945: 'Religious instruction...is from now no longer the object of schools.'⁷⁹

In this high-level dispute between the churches and the LfV, it is significant that the Soviets intervened on the side of the former and their decision was final.⁸⁰ While Kolesnitschenko sought to ensure that Church and State were separated and therefore supported the position of the LfV on confessional schools, he did not allow the LfV to enforce its position on religious instruction. A distinction must be made between Kolesnitschenko's position on confessional schools, which he thought were undesirable, and religion taught on behalf of the Christian Church but not in the context of the school curriculum, which he allowed and which the LfV sought in vain to prohibit.⁸¹ Kolesnitschenko also declared that the confiscation of church kindergartens by the LfV was unsanctioned, and they were returned.⁸² A meeting between Mitzenheim and Kolesnitschenko also resulted in the General lifting the imposed ban on using school buildings for religious instruction outside of school time.⁸³ Both churches were allowed to dispense education to children but only 'outside of school time in church-suitable rooms'.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Heiligenstadt, 24/10/45.

⁷⁸ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen, 03-031-243, 'Bericht', Eisenach, 26/10/1945.

⁷⁹ *EZAB*, 2/148, 'Mitteilungsblatt des Landesamtes für Volksbildung Land Thüringen, Weimar', 7/9/45; see also: C. Koch, p. 285; J. J. Seidel, 'Abkehr vom "Deutschen Christentum"...', p. 45.

⁸⁰ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Niederschrift', 3/10/45; *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, Freusberg and others (nine) to the American occupation authorities, 2/6/45; H. Dähn, 'Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED', p. 156; H. Siebert, pp. 185-187. The SED/SMAD relationship was, however, not entirely one-sided: J. Foitzik, pp. 63-64; on the Russian position see: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Weissenborn-Luderode to the BGVP, 29/11/45.

⁸¹ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Niederschrift', 3/10/45.

⁸² See: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 154-155.

⁸³ *LKAE*, A 930 I, 3, 'Besprechungen zwischen Mitzenheim and Kolesnitschenko', 2/10/45 and 4/10/45.

⁸⁴ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Bericht über die kirchliche Lage', 2/8/46; see also: *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 14/47, 21/6/47.

The churches took the most of this opportunity and religious instruction proceeded apace, restricted in some places only by minor issues. At Erfurt, teaching from 1946 to 1948 took place two hours weekly and the Church also ran five kindergartens comprising a total of 200 children.⁸⁵ Likewise education continued without the intervention of local authorities at Bad Salza and Bilzingsleben where there was a 'nucleus' of 30 to 40 children.⁸⁶ An overview of the Thuringian parishes compiled in May 1948 by Freusberg noted that there was a total of 659 'Teaching stations'.⁸⁷ In general, religious instruction was restricted only because no teacher was available, where refugees occupied schools, or by a lack of wood, shoes or clothes.⁸⁸ Youth groups were also not interrupted, though they were often difficult to organise in winter.⁸⁹ Protestant instruction also continued

⁸⁵ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Bericht über die kirchliche Lage', 2/8/46; *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, Freusberg to the Soviet Commandant in Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 8/1948; see also: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über das Seelsorge', Sömmerda to the BGVF, 4/10/1945; instruction at Nordhausen: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Nordhausen to the BGVF, 8/3/46; at Langensalza, *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Langensalza to the BGVF, 19/7/46; at Arnstadt (rural areas), *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 2/2/1947, 'Jahresbericht 1946 für die Arnstadt (Land)'; at Aschara, *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Tätigkeitsbericht', Aschara to the BGVF 7/1/1947; at Alach/Ringleben: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über das Jahr 1947 (Alach/Ringleben)', undated; at Arnstadt, *BEA*, Stellenakten, Arnstadt, 'Bericht 1949', undated.

⁸⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorgestelle Bad Salza, December 1945 to July 1946', Pf. Stasch to BGVF, 19/7/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgearbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47; cf. *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the *Bonifatiusverein* (Fulda), 10/7/46.

⁸⁷ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 1943-1949, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48.

⁸⁸ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorge', Sömmerda to the BGVF, 4/10/1945; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Johann Steinbach (Chairman of the Thuringian CDU) to the BGVF, 10/9/1946; also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Pf. H. Muschalek (Erfurt) to BGVF, 18/10/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht 1946 für die Arnstadt (Land)', 2/2/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die sozialen Verhältnisse und Notstände der kath. Umsiedler in Bezirk Erfurt-Ost', undated; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht' (North Erfurt), undated (probably early 1947); *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946', undated; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm', 28/1/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Seelsorgestelle Wandersleben, 15/2/50; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Erfurt to Weihbischof Adolf Bollte, 24/10/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVF, 30/7/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 1943-1949, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48.

⁸⁹ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Bericht auf mündliche Besprechung am 13. ds.', 14/3/46.

largely without issue.⁹⁰ All the attempts of local communists to restrict the religious freedom of the churches were frustrated by the consistent support given to the churches by the SMATh.⁹¹

Analysis

Three questions arise from this investigation of relations between the churches, the German communists and the Soviet authorities. Firstly, how did Russian policy toward the churches compare with policy in other areas, such as security and culture? Secondly, why there was such a particularly fractious relationship between the churches and the German communists in Thuringia? In effect, Kolesnitschenko deferred to the churches over the German socialists who were themselves Russian appointees. This irony can only be explained through a discussion of Soviet aims in Germany. How does the tolerant Russian church policy fit in with existing historiographical conceptions of Stalin's *Deutschlandpolitik*?

The conciliatory behaviour of the Russian authorities in Thuringia toward the churches was in line with Soviet religious policy throughout the SBZ. Still, the freedom enjoyed by the churches differed significantly from what was experienced in other areas of Russian policy. For instance, the SMAD and their KPD allies moved quickly after the end of the war to secure the control of the German police force.⁹² Whilst communist command was not complete in the first months after the war, control grew to the point that, by mid-1948, the police were recognised not merely as an instrument for keeping law and order but as a tool against political opponents.⁹³ The Soviet secret police in addition operated

⁹⁰ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 8/48, 9/3/48.

⁹¹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 1943-1949, Kommissariat der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz to Freusberg, 5/11/45; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 14/47, 21/6/47; *GuH*, 1/1, 21/4/46, 'Warum erteilt die Kirche Christenlehre?', Kehrle, p. 1; T. Björkman (ed.), p. 22; H. Siebert, pp. 185-187; see also: W. Tischner, pp. 259-260; N. Timofejewa, pp. 14-15.

⁹² N. Naimark, p. 355.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 356, 366; M. Dennis, p. 33ff.

throughout the zone.⁹⁴ The Russians also sought to manipulate Eastern German culture and education and place it firmly in Soviet orbit. This was attempted through the establishment of various societies for disseminating Russian culture, such as the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries (VOKS), and through Russian films, theater, music and literature. The universities and the school system too were subjected to Soviet intervention and many professors and teachers were released from their posts on the basis of being ‘politically compromised’.⁹⁵ None of this happened in the churches. That the SMATh apologised to the churches for unsanctioned interventions and rapes, that it refunded fines and overturned decisions by Russian officers and German socialists alike reflected the remarkable degree of tolerance and freedom permitted to the churches by the Soviet authorities.⁹⁶

In Thuringia, Soviet religious policy was supported by local conditions which enabled Kolesnitschenko to adopt it easily and readily. Significant issues associated with everyday occupation did not divide the churches and the SMATh. Thuringia avoided the worst Russian excesses and the relationship between Mitzenheim and Kolesnitschenko, in particular, was almost friendly.⁹⁷ Part of the reason for this may be that the soldiers who moved into Thuringia in early July 1945 had already experienced first-time occupation duty in Germany and, as a result, had left behind the ‘aggressiveness and defensiveness’ associated with the initial occupation period.⁹⁸ Certainly there were excesses and rape in Thuringia that led people to detest the Russian occupation, but these did not hinder positive relations between the churches and the Soviet authorities.⁹⁹ The other consequence of late occupation was that the Russians inherited a positive situation from their American predecessors. Thuringia not only escaped the greatest war-time destruction, but when the Red Army moved in they were helped by a relatively settled

⁹⁴ N. Naimark, pp. 378-382.

⁹⁵ In general: *ibid.*, pp. 398-464; N. Timofejewa, pp. 17-21.

⁹⁶ G. Besier, ‘Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang’, pp. 139-145.

⁹⁷ See: W. Tischner, p. 65; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 103.

⁹⁸ N. Naimark, p. 90.

⁹⁹ On the poor public image of the Russians see, for example: M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 46-48.

situation of law and order. In fact, one observer believed that ‘general conditions are better in Thuringia than in Saxony [because] the Russian occupation forces have adopted many of the measures introduced by the American Army.’¹⁰⁰ The conditions in Thuringia at the outset of the Soviet occupation therefore allowed a smooth imposition of policy toward the churches and favoured a positive relationship between the occupiers and church officials.

The relationship of the Thuringian churches to communist organisations was slightly more complicated. While the interventions of the KPD/SED in Thuringia were limited in scope and did not represent a thoroughgoing attempt to align the churches with the State, there was conflict. There were clashes especially over religious instruction, and, although the SED directed its members in most areas of the SBZ in 1946 to cooperate with the churches, this was not the case in Thuringia.¹⁰¹

There are two compelling reasons why conflict over religious instruction in Thuringia was prominent. Firstly, the German communists may have taken impetus from regional Russian commanders and local Red Army units in Thuringia. As shown, there was a considerable difference between the official Soviet policy of tolerance toward the churches and the maverick everyday behaviour of Russian troops. As a result, it is possible that the German communists in Thuringia saw these interventions in the churches and followed suit. This was especially apparent in Eichsfeld where local SED members cooperated with the regional Soviet commandant in perpetrating measures that were disavowed, upon the complaints of the Catholic Church, by Kolesnitschenko.

Secondly, Kolesnitschenko himself systematically fostered communism in Thuringia, but when local German socialists stepped beyond what he was comfortable with, he restricted their activities and sided with the churches. As Kolesnitschenko actively supported the German communists in Thuringia, the communists believed (wrongly) that they could get away with intervention in church affairs. The relationship between the Soviet authorities

¹⁰⁰ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 143.

¹⁰¹ H. Dähn, ‘Grundzüge der Kirchenpolitik von SMAD und KPD/SED’, pp. 158-159.

and the German socialists in general was close, but it was particularly intimate in Thuringia.¹⁰² Throughout Germany, for example, prominent German communists – including Walter Ulbricht, the deputy chairman of the SED, who arrived in Berlin on 30 April 1945 – were entrusted with the work of administrative reconstruction and were explicitly and actively encouraged by the Red Army and then the SMAD (which was created on 9 June 1945).¹⁰³ The German communists were, in many ways, the instruments of the SMAD.¹⁰⁴ The SMAD was also to a large degree responsible for the orchestrated merger of the KPD and SPD into the SED in April 1946, for intimidating members of the CDU and LDPD during the September 1946 local elections and for removing rival CDU leaders in 1945 and 1947.¹⁰⁵

In Thuringia specifically, the first post-war Minister President, Hermann Brill, was replaced on 16 July 1945 at the behest of the SMATh by a man with leftist sympathies and later a member of the SED, Dr. Rudolf Paul.¹⁰⁶ In so doing, the SMATh empowered the KPD to seize the reins of local government, although the KPD did not do so without significant opposition from the SPD. The so-called ‘Leftist seizure of power’ was complete by early 1946.¹⁰⁷ The Thuringian situation therefore brought the KPD/SED and the SMATh together in control of the *Land*. Kolesnitschenko himself, moreover, was very well disposed toward the KPD/SED. Kolesnitschenko sent a memorandum to Moscow on 29 November 1948 which proposed a clearing of the path for the SED to pursue socialism in Germany ‘on the democratic path’. He also recommended the abolition of ‘anti-fascist bloc politics’ in order to free the SED to wage an unmitigated

¹⁰² G. Pritchard, p. 58.

¹⁰³ M. Dennis, pp. 15-16; M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, p. 13; G. Pritchard, p. 56ff; Olaf Kappelt, *Die Entnazifizierung in der SBZ sowie die Rolle und der Einfluß ehemaliger Nationalsozialisten in der DDR als ein soziologisches Phänomen*, (Hamburg: 1997), p.225ff.

¹⁰⁴ See: G. Pritchard, p. 80ff.

¹⁰⁵ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 14-15, 161; M. Dennis, p. 26; T. Bauer, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ See, in general: Manfred Overesch, *Machtergreifung von Links. Thüringen 1945/6*, (Hildesheim, 1993); T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 90ff; H. Patze, W. Schlesinger (eds.), p. 568ff.

¹⁰⁷ M. Overesch, *Machtergreifung von Links...*, pp. 129-135.

political offensive on the CDU and LDPD.¹⁰⁸ In Thuringia, the German communists were closely linked to the SMATh and it is possible that the former believed they could seize the initiative from the churches with Kolesnitschenko's acquiescence. Yet it was not to be, and, given the key role of the SMATh in orchestrating the rise of the German socialists in Thuringia, Kolesnitschenko ironically was in the position of repudiating the directives of Russian appointees to office. An explanation of why may be ventured after a discussion of overall Soviet goals in Germany.

The picture of the treatment of the churches by the SMATh, and the SMAD in general, allows some insight into historiographical conceptions of Soviet *Deutschlandpolitik*. However, it must be kept in mind that by no means does Russian religious policy make or break existing views on Stalin's intentions toward Germany. After all, the churches were but one part of a much larger picture. Firstly, the accommodating stance of the SMATh to the churches up to 1949 offers little support to the thesis that Stalin wanted a divided Germany and a sovietised East Germany.¹⁰⁹ In this conception, communism was forced at the point of Russian bayonets in the vein of 'romantic *Realpolitik*'.¹¹⁰ The SED was no more than an obedient and reliable tool of Soviet policy in East Germany.¹¹¹ Manfred Wilke, as one of the more recent exponents of this view, posited in 1991 the existence of a Soviet *Teilungsbefehl* (order to divide) in 1945.¹¹² The incongruity of Russian church policy with the sovietisation thesis is readily apparent. The freedom offered to the churches by the SMAD simply does not fit well with an alleged process of Stalinisation,

¹⁰⁸ Elke Scherstjanoi, 'Die deutschlandpolitischen Absichten der UdSSR 1948. Erkenntnisstand und forschungsleitende Problematisierungen', in: *Das letzte Jahr der SBZ*, pp. 47, 49.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example: J.L. Snell, *Illusion and Necessity: The Diplomacy of Global War, 1939-1950*, (Boston: 1963); Manfred Wilke, 'Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 March 1991; David Childs, *The GDR: Russia's German Ally*, (London: 1983); Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War they Waged and the Peace they Sought*, (Princeton: 1957); J.P. Nettle, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany, 1945-1950*, (Oxford: 1951).

¹¹⁰ H. Feis, p. 655; J.L. Snell, p. 214; J.P. Nettle, p. 314.

¹¹¹ D. Childs, pp. 21-22; J.P. Nettle, pp. 97-98, 313.

¹¹² M. Wilke, "Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben", in: Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship, Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR*, (London: 2002), pp. 153-154.

within which the churches would have largely been suppressed. Russian church policy also poses significant problems for a theory of sovietisation in stages.¹¹³ According to this conception, the policy of tolerance was only tactical and the forced co-ordination of the churches was inevitable at some stage. If this were the case then it would follow that, although the churches were allowed freedom of religion early in the occupation period, Soviet church policy was bound to become more restrictive and repressive. However, this was simply not the case. In Thuringia, Kolesnitschenko was almost always unfailingly courteous toward the churches and he never revealed any hostile intent, even as the SED became more Stalinised and expanded its influence over government and public life in the SBZ from Summer 1947. He also did not, at any stage, give in to the pressures of the SED to intervene in the churches. Mitzenheim commented on the state of the TeK near the end of 1947:

The free expression of religion, as is guaranteed in the constitution of the State of Thuringia, is allowed. Limitations on the church sphere, which were forced upon the Church in the National Socialist period, have largely disappeared.¹¹⁴

A year later, at the end of 1948, Mitzenheim thanked Kolesnitschenko for his understanding in the past year and offered him best wishes for the next.¹¹⁵ The liberal Russian church policy from 1945 to 1948 and beyond is not easily reconciled with arguments that maintain Stalin's *Deutschlandpolitik* was dictated by a concern to sovietise East Germany. Wilke himself has since withdrawn support for his theory.¹¹⁶

However, Soviet religious policy in Thuringia would tend to lend more authority to the controversial thesis of Wilfried Loth.¹¹⁷ Loth contends, along with Vladimir Semënov,

¹¹³ See: Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship...*, pp. 151-154.

¹¹⁴ *LKAE*, A 130 II, Beiakten, 1947-1953, 139, 29/10/47.

¹¹⁵ C. Koch, pp. 260-261.

¹¹⁶ Manfred Wilke, Peter Erler, Horst Laude (eds), "*Nach Hitler kommen wir*": *Dokumente zur Programmatik der Moskauer KPD-Führung 1944/45 für Nachkriegsdeutschland*, (Berlin: 1994) p. IIIff; see also: Wilfried Loth, 'Stalin, die deutsche Frage und die DDR: Eine Antwort an meine Kritiker', *Deutschland Archiv*, (1995), p. 291.

¹¹⁷ Wilfried Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*, trans. Robert F. Hogg, (Hampshire: 1998). For criticisms of Loth's thesis at the time of its

that Stalin was prepared to concede and to construct a united and democratic Germany in order to avoid a divided Germany that would have blocked critical Russian access to the West German industrial regions.¹¹⁸ This democracy was, moreover, ‘democratic according to *western* standards’.¹¹⁹ Stalin ‘wanted no GDR. He wanted neither a separate state in the Soviet Occupation Zone nor a socialist state in Germany at all’.¹²⁰ Instead, Loth claims that the GDR was the primary product of the machinations of Walter Ulbricht and Colonel Tulpanow, the head of the information division of the SMAD. That Germany ended up divided, furthermore, was the result of the Western powers’ reticence to return to the negotiating table with Stalin.¹²¹ The behaviour of the Soviet authorities toward the churches is difficult to reconcile with the ‘sovietisation thesis’ but it is easy to reconcile with Loth’s theory. Certainly Loth’s thesis does not stand or fall on Russian church policy in Thuringia, although it is encumbered by other problems.¹²²

Soviet *Religionspolitik* also provides support for the position of Norman Naimark, who contends that Stalin did not commit himself either to a unified, neutral Germany or to a divided, socialist Germany in 1945.¹²³ In fact, Stalin had no ‘specific long-range goals in

publication see: Dietrich Staritz, ‘Die SED und Stalins Deutschlandpolitik’, *Deutschland Archiv*, (1994), pp. 854-861; Peter Zolling, ‘Mut ist oft sehr dumm’, *Der Spiegel*, 20 June 1994; Henning Köhler, ‘Stalin: ein deutscher Demokrat’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 August 1994.

¹¹⁸ ‘Stalin strove for a parliamentary democracy for all of Germany’: W. Loth, ‘Stalin, die deutsche Frage und die DDR...’, p. 291. For the position of Vladimir Semënov see Stefan Creuzberger, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsmacht und das politische System der SBZ*, (Weimar: 1996), p. 12, n.5.

¹¹⁹ W. Loth, *Stalin’s Unwanted Child...*, pp. 10, 171, 222 (emphasis mine).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. XI.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177; although Loth does also admit: ‘Zur Erklärung des real existierenden DDR-Sozialismus muß man schon andere Faktoren heranziehen: neben dem Abseitsstehen der westlichen Seite auch die Eigendynamik und die Ineffektivität des sowjetischen Apparates’ (‘Stalin, die deutsche Frage und die DDR’, p. 295).

¹²² There are other issues which discredit Loth’s thesis somewhat. For instance, Loth argues that Stalin did not desire a socialist state in Germany ‘at all’ (*Stalin’s Unwanted Child...*, p. XI, emphasis mine), but this position is at odds with other statements Loth makes later in his book about ‘the future transition to socialism’ (*ibid.*, p. 16, see also pp. 15-19) and elsewhere: ‘all roads would sooner or later lead to socialism... socialism belonged (anyway) to the future...First unity, then socialism.’ (‘Stalin, die deutsche Frage und die DDR...’, p. 294).

¹²³ See: C. Ross, *The East German Dictatorship...*, pp. 159-165.

mind'.¹²⁴ Naimark asserts that Stalin did not have an unequivocal stance on the 'German question', and, therefore, at times he oscillated between paradoxical positions according to expediency.¹²⁵ Stalin was fully apprised of the ongoing situation in the zone and it was his intent to 'stand above the fray' and intervene only when he felt it necessary to do so. There was as a result no consistent occupation policy in the early period of the zone. By summer 1947, however, 'Soviet policy sought to consolidate communist rule in the East'.¹²⁶ This development, according to Naimark, led toward the establishment of the GDR in October 1949.

Soviet *Religionspolitik* fits well with Naimark's thesis up until summer 1947. In fact, the changing and paradoxical position of Stalin has potential to explain the conflicts experienced in Thuringia between lower level Russian officers and the SMATh. Unaware of how to proceed against the churches, local Russian units, as good communists, interfered with church freedoms. This, however, was not official policy. Adding to the complex situation was the apparent contradiction of church policy with the swift and often efficient execution of denazification measures throughout Thuringia. It is therefore no wonder that there was considerable diversity in Russian interactions with the churches, and these are mirrored in the activities of the German communists. Stalin's ambiguity on the 'German question' fostered this confusion. Officially, the Soviet authorities were not committed to sovietisation or western democracy, and therefore they tolerated the socialising tendencies of the KPD/SED whilst also allowing a general freedom of religion. However, SMATh church policy is somewhat incongruous with Naimark's assertion that by summer 1947 the Soviets made a conscious effort to consolidate communist power in the SBZ. As shown above, the churches in Thuringia continued to enjoy a free hand in religious affairs and enjoyed good relations with the Russians. There was simply no change in Soviet church policy from 1945 to 1948, even

¹²⁴ N. Naimark, p. 465; see also: Dietrich Staritz, 'The SED, Stalin, and the German Question: Interests and Decision-Making in the Light of New Sources', *German History*, 10/3, (1992), p. 276ff.

¹²⁵ N. Naimark, pp. 251-353.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 352 (also p. 6).

after summer 1947, and the churches continued to enjoy almost unmitigated religious freedom.

The complex relationship between the churches and the Soviet authorities is easiest to reconcile with the thesis of Elke Scherstjanoi.¹²⁷ Scherstjanoi claims that, even in 1948 and 1949, there was no clear Soviet direction in policy and also no intent to divide Germany into two antagonistic states. While the Russians had recognised by November 1947 that there was no possibility of a united ‘democratic’ Germany, throughout 1948 the *status quo* remained despite the activities of the SED. The SED had, from late summer 1947, become increasingly Stalinised and pursued a determined course towards a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.¹²⁸ There was no intent in 1948 on the part of the Russians to divide Germany and sovietise its eastern part. In fact, SED hegemony became increasingly less reliant on Russian intervention and help.¹²⁹ The consistent Soviet policy of religious freedom to the churches from 1945 to 1948 agrees most appropriately with Scherstjanoi’s conception of Stalin’s *Deutschlandpolitik*.

The explanation of why Kolesnitschenko countermanded directives of Russian appointees even when he himself was partial to the politics of the SED is therefore rather straightforward. Kolesnitschenko was simply following orders; the *status quo* was to remain and church freedom was established policy regardless of his own political inclinations. One further explanation may relate to Mitzenheim’s position on socialism within the TeK. Mitzenheim had a rapport with Kolesnitschenko and, anxious to avoid conflict with the authorities, he tolerated religious socialists within the TeK. Many clergy throughout Germany regarded themselves as simultaneously Christians and socialists. In Thuringia, the Gera Superintendent remarked, for example, that there were a number of socialists and one SED member in his administration.¹³⁰ Mitzenheim was not hostile to

¹²⁷ E. Scherstjanoi, pp. 39-54.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 43, 45, 46-47.

¹²⁹ See, in general: M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion*, pp. 160-161.

¹³⁰ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/867/103, ‘Bericht über den Besuch der Tagung Religiöser Sozialisten in Kassel [1/6/48]’; see also, in general: Aurel von Jüchen, ‘Warum Christentum und Sozialismus einander begegnen müssen’, *Die Zeichen der Zeit*, 6, (1947), pp. 185-190; compare the

socialism and he even saw similarities between it and Christianity, which he expressed to Tulpanow.¹³¹ Because Mitzenheim tolerated, even marginally supported socialism, and, like the Catholic Church, posed no problems for the SMATh, Kolesnitschenko saw no reason to intervene. He followed overarching Soviet *Religions-* and *Deutschlandpolitik* to the letter.

Conclusion

The churches were offered almost uninhibited freedom of religion by the American and Russian occupying forces in Thuringia. While the Soviets were more than willing to take a step back and allow the churches to dispense religious education and to conduct their business within their own sphere with few restrictions, the most opposition came from German communists. There was, for example, agitation in Eichsfeld. Even this opposition, however, was often nullified because of the ultimate authority of the SMATh, whose policy was careful not to antagonise the churches. The relationship between the TeK and the Russian authorities was even quite close. Mitzenheim enjoyed an amiable interaction with Kolesnitschenko and he also thanked Tulpanow for ‘helping the German people to overcome the catastrophe [of 1945]’.¹³²

The Russians respected the popularity of the churches in Thuringia and decided not to force themselves upon religious communities, much less push through an atheistic program of sovietisation. Instead, the *Religionspolitik* of the SMATh, as representative of the SMAD, supports the contention that Stalin had no long-term goal in mind with the occupation of East Germany and rather sought to keep his options open even, according to Elke Scherstjanoi, in 1948. Regardless of the increasing Stalinisation of the SED and its development into a ‘party of the new type’ from 1947 and 1948, which made its policy increasingly atheistic, the churches managed to remain independent and major clashes

positive attitude of the SED toward religiously minded members in the July 1946 SED circular: F. Hartweg (ed.), pp. 42-43, also: pp. 45-53; R. Wenzel (ed.), pp. 78-79; G. Besier, ‘Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang’, pp. 135ff, 145; *LKAE*, A 930 V, Superintendentur Gera to the LKR, 3/8/46.

¹³¹ Sergej Tulpanow, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege (1945-1949). Erinnerungen eines Offiziers der Sowjetarmee*, (East Berlin: 1986), p. 241.

¹³² S. Tulpanow, p. 241.

were delayed until after the foundation of the GDR in October 1949.¹³³ It was only in the 1950s with the battle between the FDJ and the JG for the hearts and minds of young people and with the conflict between ‘substitute’ SED and church rites from 1954/1955 that the break was complete.¹³⁴

It also seems that the SED learned its lessons in Eichsfeld during the period of the SBZ. The blatantly interventionist policy, which was largely unsuccessful in the period of the SBZ and was indeed repudiated by the SMATh, was abolished in the early years of the GDR. While the Catholic Church in Eichsfeld was ostensibly subjected to greater pressures exerted by the KPD/SED and local Russian authorities in the early years of the SBZ than elsewhere in Thuringia – perhaps due to its devout Catholicism – Mark Allinson has shown that the SED followed a more circumspect and pragmatic position during the 1950s.¹³⁵ This was largely due to the realisation that the dense Catholic milieu posed greater opposition to the SED dictatorship than elsewhere.

In the period 1945 to 1948, however, the Thuringian churches enjoyed freedom of religion under the aegis of the SMATh. The result was that, in the post-war period, the churches occupied a largely unassailable position that offered them an unprecedented opportunity to expand their influence over the population and to instil Christian behaviour.

¹³³ On the Stalinisation of the SED see: G. Pritchard, p. 163ff; J. Foitzik, p. 55; M. Dennis, pp. 29-30; its policy increasingly atheistic: F. Hartweg (ed.), p. 23.

¹³⁴ See: M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 93-109, also, there were conflicts with the clergy: pp. 88-93; Hörst Dähn, ‘Sozialistische Riten und ihre Rolle in der SED-Kirchenpolitik’, *Agenda DDR-Forschung*, ed. H. Timmermann, (Münster: 2005), pp. 310-328; M. Thomas, pp. 215-217; R. Mau, *Eingebunden in den Realsozialismus?...*, pp. 22-26.

¹³⁵ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 111-112.

3: Church efforts in pastoral and material care in Thuringia, 1945-1948

In the last stages of the war, large numbers of refugees flooded into Germany from their homelands in Eastern Europe. In particular, many fled before the advance of the Red Army from autumn 1944, while the Soviet offensive in early 1945 forced as many as four to five million German civilians to flee further west.¹ One estimate places the number of total refugees up until the early 1950s at 11,730,000.² In Thuringia, the number of refugees on 29 October 1946 was 607,390.³ These people were largely destitute and so represented the ‘cardinal problem of the churches and the Thuringian administration’.⁴ At least 50 percent of the refugees were Catholics, most of whom came from the Sudetenland and Silesia.⁵ It is the purpose of this chapter to investigate the role of the Catholic Church in the community at large and to examine the situation of the refugees and the responses of the Church. In an environment of ‘shockingly great’ need, the key

¹ Rolf-Dieter Müller, Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Kriegsende 1945. Die Zerstörung des Deutschen Reiches*, (Frankfurt am Main: 1994), p. 114; Mathias Beer, ‘Alteingesessene und Flüchtlinge in Deutschland 1945-1949: Eine Konfliktgemeinschaft’, in: *Der Neubeginn. Deutschland zwischen 1945-1949*, (Hamburg: 2005), pp. 88-91.

² R-D. Müller, G.R. Ueberschär, p. 123.

³ *KH*, 1944-51, p. 205.

⁴ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, ‘Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld’, 14/8/46; see also: E. Gatz, ‘Entwicklungslinien nach Zweiten Weltkrieg’, pp. 62-64; A. M. Birke, pp. 184-185.

⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Jahresbericht der Seelsorgestelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946’; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Sondershausen to Freusberg, 7/7/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Freusberg to the BGVF, 3/6/46; cf. other reports which give the Catholic composition of the refugees as 60 percent: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage’, Freusberg, 9/8/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen’, Freusberg, 1/7/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Abgewandertenseelsorge im Thüringischen Teil des Bistums Fulda’, 11/2/1946; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Freusberg to the Kommissariat der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz (Berlin), 15/2/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Freusberg to the BGVF, 3/6/46. One exception was Linderbach where the refugees comprised three times more Protestants than Catholics: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorglich-caritativen Verhältnisse in Seelsorgsbezirk Erfurt-Ost (Linderbach)’, undated (probably early 1947). In general, throughout the area of the later SBZ the number of Catholics in the population climbed from 6.1% in 1939 to 12.2% in 1946: W. Tischner, pp. 56-57.

consideration was that the refugees maintained their faith.⁶ The Catholic Church in the post-war era, therefore, sought to ensure this through the material and especially spiritual care of the enormous number of evacuees who entered Thuringia.⁷ One question in particular arises: how effective were the responses of the Catholic Church to the crisis?

While the Catholic Church made vigorous efforts to alleviate the refugees' plight, the structure, resources and clergy of the Church were simply unable to cope with the vast numbers. By the end of 1948, a situation of need still existed. The work involved in the reconstruction of Protestant church life was much less affected by the influx of refugees, although significant problems did present themselves.⁸

The nature of the problem and the stress on church structures

The large number of refugees in Thuringia in January 1947 ensured that Catholic re-settlers lived in most towns.⁹ Freusberg's estimate of displaced persons in the Thuringian part of the Fulda diocese in early 1947 was 750,000.¹⁰ A conflicting report (probably) dating also from early 1947 put the total of refugees at 600,000 and predicted the arrival of a further 200,000 to 300,000.¹¹ Apart from the Catholic areas of Eichsfeld and Geisa, the refugees comprised a very significant proportion

⁶ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Apolda to the BGVF, 9/10/46; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVF, 30/7/1947; see also: B. Mitzscherlich, p. 387.

⁷ BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46; R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 73; G. Niemczik, p. 33; A. M. Birke, pp. 184-185.

⁸ Hubert Kirchner, 'Zum Verhältnis von Katholiken und Protestanten im geteilten Deutschland – die evangelische Perspektive', in: *Zwei Staaten – zwei Kirchen? Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland*, eds. J. Mehlhausen, L. Siegele-Wenschkewitz, (Leipzig: 2000), p. 146.

⁹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47.

¹⁰ Ibid.; cf. number put at 401,365 on 3/6/46 (which does not, of course, take into account the large numbers of refugees, largely Sudeten Germans, who streamed into Thuringia in the second half of 1946): BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Freusberg to the BGVF, 3/6/46. Also see: *Fulda kirchliches Amtsblatt*, 14/8/46, 62, which put the number of refugees at 1,000,000 and the number of Catholics at 600,000; '6- 800,000 Catholics': BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, 'Bericht über die religiöse und politische Lage in Thüringen, speziell im Eichsfeld', 14/8/46; more than 600.000: G. Niemczik, p. 31.

¹¹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated. For a possible explanation of why this report was written in English, see below n. 72.

of Catholics in Thuringian towns and such was the scale of the influx that, in many places, refugee Catholics outnumbered native Catholics. For instance, in the area of Erfurt-Meiningen in 1949, 370,000 of 444,300 Catholics were refugees.¹² Catholics in the greater Erfurt area prior to the flood of evacuees numbered in the region of 15,000; in 1946, there were around 40,000.¹³ At Bad Salza, 2232 of 2376 Catholics were refugees, two-thirds of the 9000 Catholics at Jena were immigrants and at Gotha there were 4,000 Catholics before the war and, on 5 July 1946, 20,000-30,000. There were fears that the number in Gotha would rise as high as 50,000.¹⁴ A 1948 report on the *Würzburger Diaspora* in Meiningen stated that Catholics comprised one-fifth to one-sixth of the total population where previously the ratio had been around 50 Protestants to one Catholic.¹⁵ In total, in the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese, the 428,358 Catholics comprised 19.5% of the total population, which represented a 160.6% growth on the 1940 figure of 263,987.¹⁶

The refugees that flooded into Thuringia placed huge stress on existing Catholic facilities. In fact, due to a lack of buildings, inadequate facilities and often insurmountable distances, Catholic life in any places throughout Thuringia was significantly impeded and not all believers received its consolations.¹⁷ Church structures were unable to care effectively for the refugees. Freusberg summed up the general situation in this way:

¹² J. Pilvousek, p. 14.

¹³ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Bericht über kirchliche Lage', Freusberg to the Russian commandant in Erfurt, 2/8/46; numbers in Sömmerda: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorge', Sömmerda to the BGVF, 4/10/1945; in Nordhausen: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Nordhausen to the BGVF, 8/3/46.

¹⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über das Jahr 1946', Bad Salza to the BGVF, 22/4/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Jena to Freusberg, 5/11/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Gotha to Freusberg, 5/7/46.

¹⁵ *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 34, 'Die Würzburger Diaspora in der russischen Zone. Stand und Sicherungsmaßnahmen', 4/2/48.

¹⁶ *KH*, 1944-51, p. 327.

¹⁷ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bad Frankenhausen to BGVF, Easter 1947; *KH*, 1944-51, p. 213.

The number of Catholics who have been resettled to Thuringia is extremely high. [Yet] in only a few towns in the state of Thuringia are [there] Catholic churches. A great number of the re-settlers therefore have no opportunity to attend a Catholic service although they demand it.¹⁸

The pre-war parish demarcations were simply inadequate for dealing with the post-war diaspora. At Stadtilm, for instance, the local priest concluded that it was not possible to offer adequate pastoral care in the district entrusted to him, which encompassed 35 towns.¹⁹

Despite the difficulties, the Catholic Church responded energetically to the problem and a reconfiguration of the parishes was an absolute necessity. Existing parishes were divided and new 'Pastoral Care Areas' (Seelsorgebezirke), 'Diaspora pastoral care stations' (Diasporaseelsorgsstationen or Seelsorgestellen) and 'churches of necessity' (Notkirchen) were created in order to care more efficiently for parishioners.²⁰ On 17 March 1947, Freusberg issued a directive for division.²¹ Three of the 21 towns administered by the Bleicherode parish, for instance, were transferred to the nearby Bischofferode parish in an attempt to manage the workload of the priests and reduce distances.²²

Despite the reconfiguration, many pastorates had to make do with their newly assigned areas which often remained geographically large. For example, Arnstadt was divided into eight *Seelsorgebezirke*.²³ One of these areas included the *Kaplanstelle* of Arnstadt and nine nearby towns, all of which were three to five kilometres distant. The other areas

¹⁸ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the Thuringian Minister President, 20/11/45.

¹⁹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Stadtilm to Arnstadt, 11/4/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, 17/3/47; cf. BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorgestelle Bad Salza', 12/1945 to 7/1946, Pf. Stasch to the BGVE, 19/7/46; cf. the need for transport at Suhl: BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Suhl to the BGVE, 5/47.

²⁰ *Fulda kirchliches Amtsblatt*, 62, 14/8/46; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Jahresbericht der Seelsorgestelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946'; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Schmalkaden to Erfurt, 2/4/47; cf. BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946'; DAW, BKM, K3 13.2.1, Kaplan Ignaz Friedrich to the Bischöfliche Ordinariat Würzburg, 30/12/46; in general: W. Tischner, pp. 45-46, 57.

²¹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, 17/3/47.

²² BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVE, 30/6/1947.

²³ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Arnstadt to Erfurt, 28/4/47; see also: BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Stadtilm to Arnstadt, 11/4/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Schmalkaden to Erfurt, 2/4/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Suhl to Erfurt, 8/4/47.

were also grouped according to the size of the local Catholic population and geographical proximity.²⁴ This was common.²⁵ Still, division was often inhibited by a shortage of clergy. A handwritten scrawl dated 29 December 1947, written on the paper of an earlier report due to the paper shortage, noted: ‘Dr. Loos is in Apolda. Erection of an office not possible at the moment because of a lack of priests.’²⁶ In total, by June 1946 the Catholic Church had established 45 new pastoral care stations, and, in an overview of diaspora pastoral care on 7 May 1948, Freusberg stated that the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese comprised 89 pastoral care areas.²⁷

Local churches also responded vigorously to the need and multiple services on Sundays were common in order to ensure that most Catholics were able to attend.²⁸ The Bad Salza parish held a weekly service to provide for over 1,000 Catholics. Hitherto, services had been only fortnightly. The parish, moreover, held services at five of the 18 towns in its jurisdiction where there had previously been none.²⁹ At Arnstadt, four services were held every Sunday for the 4,000 strong community.³⁰ The scheduling of services was also tweaked and a night-time Sunday mass was a necessity given that most people could not attend the morning mass because of work commitments.³¹

²⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Arnstadt to Erfurt, 28/4/47.

²⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Schmalkaden to Erfurt, 2/4/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, ‘Jahresbericht für 1946’ (Bad Salza); *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, ‘Kurzer Bericht über die seelsorglichen Verhältnisse der Seelsorgsstelle Königsee/Thür.’, 29/3/47; see also: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Langensalza to Erfurt, 19/7/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Suhl to Erfurt, 8/4/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

²⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Apolda to the BGVF, 9/10/46.

²⁷ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Erfurt to the BGVF, 3/6/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

²⁸ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47.

²⁹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht über die Seelsorgsstelle Bad Salza’, 12/1945 to 7/1946, Pf. Stasch to the BGVF, 19/7/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, ‘Jahresbericht für 1946’, Bad Salza; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über das Jahr 1946’, Bad Salza to the BGVF, 22/4/47; cf. *BEA*, Stellenakten, Bad Berka, ‘Bericht 1949’.

³⁰ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Jahresbericht 1946 für die Pfarrgemeinde Arnstadt (Stadt)’, 2/2/1947.

³¹ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, ‘Abendmesse – ein wirkliches Bedürfnis’, 12/4/46.

Despite these measures, the Catholic Church was forced to seek other alternatives to existing structures in order to minister more effectively to its adherents. Given the huge influx of Catholic refugees into previously small Catholic enclaves, most local chapels and church buildings simply could not cope with the people who turned up to church services. The cramped conditions in existing churches forced many to stand. At Rudolstadt, only 300 of a community of 3,500 could squeeze into the chapel. 90 sitting places forced latecomers to stand with their bodies pressed closely together. The consequence of this cramped environment, especially in summer, was regular fainting.³² Many stayed away as a result. With an increase to over 1,000 Catholics in Bad Salza, the local chapel simply could not cope and the Eucharist could not be taken.³³ The lack of church space in the parish of Sondershausen – where the number of Catholics jumped from 800 to 3,500 – led many to attend Protestant services in lieu of going without.³⁴ People simply wanted ‘something religious’.³⁵ This was common and Freusberg noted that, due to a lack of priests and churches, Catholic children were baptised and confirmed as Protestants as well as being instructed in evangelical religious truths.³⁶ Similarly, in Meiningen, many received Lutheran instruction and couples were wed in the Protestant tradition in the absence of Catholic churches and priests.³⁷

³² *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, the Rudolstadt parish to the Protestant Superintendent of Rudolstadt, 8/5/48.

³³ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht über die Seelsorgestelle Bad Salza’, 12/1945 to 7/1946, Pf. Stasch to the BGVF, 19/7/46.

³⁴ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Sondershausen to Erfurt, 7/7/46; see also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage’, Freusberg to the BGVF, 9/8/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946’; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Freusberg to the BGVF, 11/2/47.

³⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated (probably early 1947); *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen’, Freusberg to the BGVF, 1/7/46.

³⁶ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

³⁷ *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 34, ‘Die Würzburger Diaspora in der russischen Zone. Stand und Sicherungsmaßnahmen’, 4/2/48.

Given the inadequacy of church structures to cope with the demand, the Catholic Church was forced to seek the use of local evangelical chapels, which were invariably much larger due to the Protestant majority in most Thuringian towns.³⁸ The Protestant LKR decreed that, where no Catholic Church existed, the local evangelical church was to be offered for use free of charge.³⁹ As a result, there was close cooperation between the churches in a considerable number of areas and communities.⁴⁰ At Erfurt, for instance, the local evangelical church stored its collection of scrap metal in the courtyard of the Catholic Cathedral at no cost and Catholic communities were allowed to use evangelical chapels in the area. The Protestant Superintendent remarked: 'We see in the giving, as also in the receiving, a proof that we yet serve one Lord, the crucified, resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.'⁴¹ The evangelical church at Bad Frankenhausen was placed at the disposal of the Catholic mission for the concluding service, which was attended by 750 believers.⁴² Religious instruction and church services took place at Kannawurf and Bilzingsleben in evangelical chapels for 450 and 200 Catholics respectively; the relationship between confessions was 'good' and 'very good'.⁴³

³⁸ For example, Rudolstadt: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, the Rudolstadt parish to the Protestant Superintendent of Rudolstadt, 8/5/48; Steinbach-Hallenberg: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Schmalkaden to Erfurt, 2/4/47.

³⁹ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 7/47, 26/3/47.

⁴⁰ For example: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1943-1949, 'Tätigkeitsbericht', Aschara to the BGVF, 7/1/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die sozialen Verhältnisse und Notstände der kath. Umsiedler in Bezirk Erfurt-Ost', undated; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über die Seelsorge', Sömmerda to the BGVF, 4/10/1945; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946'; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm', 28/1/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Stepfershausen, Meiningen, 1/2/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Bad Frankenhausen, Easter 1947; *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 32, 'Bericht über die Fahrt des Caritas Direktors der Diözese Würzburg in die Diaspora in Süd-Thüringen vom 20 Mai-2 Juni 1948'; *DAW*, BKM, K2 0.2.5, 'Zusammenfassung', undated; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bad Frankenhausen to the BGVF, Easter 1947; *LKAE*, A 610, 20, 'Bericht über das Ergebnis der Rundfrage betr. Verhältnis der Konfessionen im Bereiche der TeK, (Juni 1947)', 26/1/1948; *LKAE*, A 240 IV, Greiz, 15/1/47.

⁴¹ *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche, Kriegssachen, 1939-1947, Breithaupt to Freusberg, 10/10/47.

⁴² *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Bad Frankenhausen to Erfurt, 6/6/48.

⁴³ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47; services in evangelical churches also at Oberbösa, Niederbösa, Frömmstedt.

There was, however, tension in some locales. At Aschara, the local Catholic priest lamented the refusal of the evangelical pastor to allow the use of the local church although the pastor's predecessor had permitted it despite Nazi prohibitions.⁴⁴ At Rudolstadt, the Catholic Church cited Matthew 25:35 ('I was a stranger and you took me in'), as a plea for the use of the local evangelical church while it also stressed that there was no 'confessional thirst for power'.⁴⁵ The request was nonetheless denied.⁴⁶ In another instance, an appeal to use the evangelical chapel at Bindersleben was rejected on practical grounds – the local school was available for Catholic services and chapels in Erfurt, Schmira and Alach were close – and on theological grounds:

The cult of Saints and of Mary in the Catholic Church as well as the practice of indulgences with its transmission of mankind's merit significantly hinders, to the evangelical conscience bound to God's word, the leasing of a number of God's houses for Catholic services, mass and other celebrations.

Other 'unpleasant' incidents in Bindersleben, such as the invocation of a Catholic saint in an evangelical children's church service, were divisive.⁴⁷

According to one report submitted on the diaspora in Southern Thuringia, relations between the confessions depended on the 'grace or disfavour of the Protestant Church'.⁴⁸ The severe need of Catholic churches to use larger chapels placed them at the mercy of local Protestants. In essence, the evangelical churches held all the cards and they were, in most places, prepared to allow Catholics throughout Thuringia access to their facilities. Regarding the situation in the Erfurt district in March 1946, Freusberg informed the Russian commandant in Erfurt, Lieutenant Kolosenko, that relations were 'peaceful and

⁴⁴ *BEA*, Stellenakten, Aschara to the BGVF, undated; also see: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Leutenberg, 2/2/47.

⁴⁵ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, the Rudolstadt parish to the Protestant Superintendent of Rudolstadt, 8/5/48.

⁴⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, the Protestant Superintendent of Rudolstadt to the Rudolstadt parish, 11/8/48.

⁴⁷ *BEA*, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche, Kriegssachen, 1939-1947, Bindersleben (Prot.) to Bindersleben (Cath.), 11/11/1948.

⁴⁸ *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 34, 'Die Würzburger Diaspora in der russischen Zone. Stand und Sicherungsmaßnahmen', 4/2/48.

harmonious'.⁴⁹ A TeK report issued in early 1948 noted that in over half the parishes pastors described relations with their Catholic counterparts as 'good'; relations were also expressed as 'really good', 'friendly', 'neighbourly', 'courteous', 'obliging', 'brotherly' and 'correct'. The relationship in other places, interestingly, was reported as 'still good' or 'hitherto satisfactory', as if something were bound to go awry. The conduct of Catholic priests was also often 'neutral' or 'reserved but friendly'. In only a very few cases was a 'high-handed ambition for power' noted as souring interaction. In general, relations were very good.⁵⁰ The outcome was that, in most cases, Protestant communities permitted the use of their chapels and the Catholic Church managed to provide for its believers in a way that was not possible using its own facilities.

The lack of clergy

The influx of displaced persons into Thuringia placed great stress not only on the available facilities, but also on the clergy. The greatest problem for both churches was the lack of clergy to minister to communities, and, as a result, churchmen were the churches' most valuable resource.⁵¹ In early 1946, over 50,000 Catholics were without pastoral care and one report, dating from mid-1949, described the lack of priests throughout Thuringia as 'catastrophic'.⁵² Established parishes and recently erected pastoral care stations demanded the services of a cleric (or additional clergy as the case may be), or at least a designated helper (Seelsorgehelfer). Often no priests, however, could be spared. In the

⁴⁹ *BEA*, C II a16, SMA Thüringen, 'Bericht', 14/3/46.

⁵⁰ *LKAE*, A 610, 20, 'Bericht über das Ergebnis der Rundfrage betr. Verhältnis der Konfessionen im Bereiche der TeK, (Juni 1947)', 26/1/1948; cf. *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über meine Seelsorgstätigkeit in Leutenberg im Jahre 1946', 2/1/47.

⁵¹ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 11/48, 5/5/48; E. Gatz, 'Entwicklungslinien nach Zweiten Weltkrieg', pp. 58-59; *KH*, 1944-51, pp. 214-215.

⁵² *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48.

Meiningen *Komissariat* there were very few healthy priests capable of work.⁵³ Only 28 clergymen were available to minister to approximately 51,179 Catholics in 420 towns.⁵⁴

The result for the Catholic Church was that it was largely unable to offer pastoral care to all who required it and the Church was forced to keep existing priests of advanced age or of bad health at their posts.⁵⁵ In doing so, the Church exposed its inability to care sufficiently for its adherents. This was the case at Berntarode where a crippled former serviceman, Father Feldmann, administered three filial communities attached to the 2,000 strong community in Berntarode.⁵⁶ In a letter to Fulda, Feldmann lamented his failure to fulfil his duties and vented his frustration and exasperation in a way that reflected an unmistakable sense of abandonment by the wider Church.⁵⁷ At Bischofferode, also, the priest wrote: 'I am always completely exhausted...perhaps a younger man could come here in late summer.'⁵⁸ Less than half of the priests available to the Catholic Church were under 40 years old, and, while it appears that the Church was in a favourable position as only about 20 percent of the clergy were over 50, the great distances involved, combined with often poor nutrition, were much too onerous for all except the most youthful. In fact, Freusberg called his clergy 'significantly superannuated'.

⁵³ DAW, BKM, K2 5.4, Domkapitular Brande to Meiningen, 23/1/48; DAW, BKM, K2 5.4, Meiningen to Domkapitular Brande, 24/2/47; DAW, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert or mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984, p. 43.

⁵⁴ DAW, Akt Meiningen Dekanat, 'Statistische Zusammenfassung für die caritative und kirchliche Betreuung in ehemaligen Herzogtum', 1/9/48; cf. BFA, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Geisa to the BGVF, 6/2/46.

⁵⁵ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Uder/Eichsfeld to the BGVF, 1/8/46; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Pf. Richard Hellmann to the BGVF, 19/5/47.

⁵⁶ BEA, Stellenakten, Berntarode, Freusberg to Berntarode, 22/05/47.

⁵⁷ On the sense of abandonment see, for example: BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

⁵⁸ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Pf. Richard Hellmann to the BGVF, 19/5/47; see also: BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Baden-Baden (Provinzial Heinhage) to the BGVF, 27/9/48; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, Schmalkaden to Erfurt, 2/4/47.

Figure I: Priests in active pastoral care: 7 May 1948⁵⁹

25-30 years old:	1 priest
30-35 years old:	15 priests
35-40 years old:	26 priests
40-45 years old:	17 priests
45-50 years old:	15 priests
50-55 years old:	0 priests
55-60 years old:	12 priests
60-65 years old:	9 priests
65-70 years old:	1 priest
70-75 years old:	1 priest
Total:	97 priests

The clerical problems of the Church were compounded by injury to the priesthood. As a result of age combined with extreme fatigue, in the Erfurt district alone three priests collapsed with heart complaints.⁶⁰ One priest, over the Christmas period in the dead of winter, covered 90 kilometres on foot laden with the mass case. Freusberg's commentary: '*Erfolg: Zusammenbruch*' (Result: collapse).⁶¹ It was common for priests to walk 20 to 30 kilometres or more every Sunday.⁶² At Bleicherode, the local clergyman suffered a nervous breakdown and was not able to travel to the 21 towns in his parish.⁶³ Other priests were admitted to hospital on similar grounds; some were never able to return to

⁵⁹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48; cf. BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Freusberg to *Kanonikus* Tinschert (Görlitz), 15/2/46. The table also reflects that the recruitment of clergy during the 1930s and 1940s was woefully inadequate. This may be attributed primarily to the persecution the Catholic Church faced from the Nazi government throughout Germany from 1934 to 1939 and the lack of young and able-bodied recruits from 1939 to 1945 due to wartime conscription.

⁶⁰ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated; in general see: M. Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', pp. 14-15.

⁶¹ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47.

⁶² BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda', Freusberg, 7/5/48; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 1943-1949, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated.

⁶³ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the Bonifatiusverein (Fulda), 10/7/46.

duty.⁶⁴ One cleric, tasked with the care of 35 towns in the Königsee parish (which encompassed a large hilly area), reported in early 1947 that he was ‘fairly exhausted’ and able to perform only the most necessary tasks after covering 2,000 kilometres by rail, 1,800 kilometres on his bicycle and 1,000 kilometres on foot from September 1946 to March 1947.⁶⁵ That the clergy were forced to travel walk extensively was a major contributing factor to sickness, infirmity and loss of strength. So too was, in some cases, a lack of food.⁶⁶ A priest from Bad Salza described his situation as ‘horrific’: ‘No money, no food, no wood, no coal...today I no longer know what I am supposed to live on.’⁶⁷ The situation was also catastrophic for *all* inhabitants at Bilzingsleben.⁶⁸ The Church was simply unable to overcome the issues associated with the health and age of the clergy. Freusberg outlined the complete lack of young clerics in a letter to the Bonifatius Union in early 1947 and noted the failure of many older priests to perform their duties.⁶⁹ The problem regarding the recruitment of younger men had not been solved even as late as May 1948.⁷⁰

Despite the ultimate failure of the Church to deploy an adequate number of able priests, it did make vigorous efforts to solve the problems of the clergy. It attempted to acquire

⁶⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVF, 30/6/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Katholische Seelsorgsstation Vieselbach, Pfarrei Weimar, Bericht über das 1. Halbjahr 1947’, 1/7/47; *BEA*, Stellenakten, Bad Sachsa to Freusberg, 15/12/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Nordhausen to the BGVF, 21/10/47; *BFA*, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Geisa to the BGVF, 6/2/46.

⁶⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 306, ‘Kurzer Bericht über die seelsorglichen Verhältnisse der Seelsorgsstelle Königsee/Thür.’, 29/3/47; at Stadtilm, the distance covered per month was ‘500-600km’: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47.

⁶⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVF, 30/6/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946 (Wangenheim)’, 17/1/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage’, Freusberg, 9/8/46.

⁶⁷ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bad Salza to the BGVF, 11/12/47.

⁶⁸ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

⁶⁹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47.

⁷⁰ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

bicycles, although they were often hard to come by.⁷¹ According to a report (written in English): ‘Only 2 or 3 priests are in possession of a bicycle. Motor-cars or wheels [?] are things from fairy-land: once upon a time.’⁷² Where they were available, however, bicycles were the order of the day. 30 bicycles funded by a donation from the Pope in June 1948 were intended for the exclusive use of priests involved in the pastoral care of eastern refugees.⁷³ It was not until late 1947 or 1948 (as was most common) that priests were offered bicycles and/or motorcycles.⁷⁴ Although they were not widespread, bicycles and motorbikes were lifelines that allowed priests greater mobility to give more regular masses in larger areas.⁷⁵

The Catholic Church also redistributed existing priests to areas in great need and deployed new clergy as soon as possible.⁷⁶ The Church encouraged the movement of churchmen from West Germany to East Germany in order to help with the diaspora. The priests included not only former Thuringians who had fled to the West but also West

⁷¹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Bad Frankenhausen, Easter 1947; also: *DAW*, BKM, K2 0.2.5, ‘Zusammenfassung’, undated; See also on the gift of a Triumph motorbike and the ensuing issues with it: *BFA*, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, the BGVF to Lengsfeld, 4/2/48; Lengsfeld to the BGVF, 11/10/48.

⁷² *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated. It is highly probable that the author of this English language report was appraising foreign brothers of the general situation in Thuringia, and particularly the plight of priests in the diaspora. See also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen,’ Freusberg, 1/7/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946’.

⁷³ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn) to Freusberg, 2/6/48.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Pf. Leo Gorny in Klettwitz: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg directive, 7/12/48; also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Päpstliche Beauftragte an die Seelsorge der Heimatvertriebenen Deutschen Vertretung in Berlin to Caritas (Erfurt), 1/12/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage’, Freusberg, 9/8/46; calls for unused bicycles to be donated: *Fulda kirchliches Amtsblatt*, 30/8/47, 63.

⁷⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated; *BFA*, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Dermbach to the BGVF, 12/8/47; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Neustadt/Orla to the BGVF, 25/5/48; and, upon gift of a motorbike, ‘Gott sei Dank’: *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Neustadt/Orla to the BGVF, 25/8/48.

⁷⁶ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Freusberg to Bad Frankenhausen, 11/11/47; *BEA*, Stellenakten, Dingelstedt, Freusberg to Eisenach, 29/11/48; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Hildebrandshausen to the BGVF, 24/10/47.

Germans.⁷⁷ A letter from one cleric moving from Essen to Schmalkalden, for example, requested further information on his placement and what he ought to bring with him.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, due to political realities and conditions in Thuringia, many clergymen preferred to move west or remain in the west and it was very difficult to persuade them over to work in Thuringia.⁷⁹ On the contrary, many Thuringian priests left for the western zones because of the poor living conditions and burdensome duties placed upon them.⁸⁰

Another initiative forced upon the Catholic Church in order to address the lack of local priests was the insertion of refugee clergy throughout Thuringia.⁸¹ One such evacuee priest was Richard Hellmann, who was in service at Bischofferode from October 1946. Hellmann was formerly a priest at Rohnstock in Silesia and was, with his community, evicted by Poles on 5 October 1946 before arriving in Thuringia ‘after frightful experiences’.⁸² In terms of numbers, a pastoral care questionnaire probably dating from mid-1946 put the number of evacuee churchmen throughout Thuringia at 76 while the number further required was ‘at least 15’.⁸³ Clerics from the Sudetenland operating in Mecklenburg and Thuringia in 1947 (or early 1948) numbered 64. The total of refugee

⁷⁷ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Baden-Baden (Provinzial Heinhage) to the BGVF, 27/9/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, Zentralregistratur, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

⁷⁸ *BEA*, Stellenakten, Brotterode, Brotterode to Schmalkalden, 28/10/47; *BEA*, Stellenakten, Brotterode, the Archbishop of Cologne to Freusberg, 13/10/47.

⁷⁹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Kommissariat der Fuldaer Bischofskonferenz to Freusberg, 5/11/45; priests from the East moving further West: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Limburg (Provinzial der Pallottiner) to the BGVF, 21/2/46.

⁸⁰ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

⁸¹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated; *BEA*, Stellenakten, Bad Sachsa to Freusberg, 15/12/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Curriculum Vitae des Pfarrers Paul Stasch aus Oelsi/Schlesien. z. Zt. in Bad Salza, Pfarrei Apolda’; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Rudolf Kirchner (Friedrichslohra), am Feste der Hl. Familie 1947’; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Eisenach to Bürgermeisteramt Wünschensuhl, 5/8/46; in general see: W. Tischner, p. 57; B. Mitzscherlich, pp. 387-388.

⁸² *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Pf. Richard Hellmann to the BGVF, 19/5/47.

⁸³ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Fragebogen’, undated; *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Freusberg to the BGVF, 1/10/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Freusberg to Bishop Johannes Dietz (Fulda), 16/4/49; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Apolda to the BGVF, 9/10/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Johann Steinbach (Chairman of the Thuringian CDU) to the BGVF, 10/9/1946; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Sondershausen to the BGVF, 4/5/47.

priests from all former German eastern territories in January 1947 numbered 89.⁸⁴ Despite the somewhat impressive number, half were either over 60 years old or suffering from some form of physical impediment or handicap.⁸⁵ The evacuee clergy were, nevertheless, especially useful in the context of mission drives, and the Silberhausen mission report noted, for instance, that the visit of a refugee priest to all re-settlers before the mission led a great many of them to attend.⁸⁶

The Catholic Church also appointed helpers who were lay people intended to minister to the spiritual and material needs of the population.⁸⁷ Helpers were particularly valuable to communities which had no priest. For example, at Bad Frankenhausen the helpers were considered ‘the active nucleus of the community’.⁸⁸ To recruit them, however, required funds and, in the difficult economic climate of post-war Germany, not all parishes or Pastoral Care Stations could afford the expense.⁸⁹ By May 1948, there were 170 helpers in Thuringia, twice as many than in 1947.⁹⁰ Even this number, however, was not sufficient to cover the lack of priests in the Thuringian diaspora.⁹¹

⁸⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, ‘Zur Zeit in Mecklenburg (u. Thüringen) folgende sudetendeutsche Geistliche’, undated; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47; cf. *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated.

⁸⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated.

⁸⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Mission Fragebogen’, Silberhausen, 1/12/47.

⁸⁷ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48; for example, in Apolda: *BEA*, Stellenakten, Apolda, Freusberg to Apolda, 10/9/47; at Langensalza: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Langensalza to Erfurt, 19/7/46; at Bad Frankenhausen: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, ‘Aposteltag in Bad Frankenhausen am 11.5.47’; in Meiningen: *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, ‘Frustriert or mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert’, 1984, p. 43; the helpers also included refugees: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht’, Bilzingsleben to the BGVP, 25/4/47.

⁸⁸ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, ‘Die Laienhelfer in der Gemeindegarbeit’ (Bad Frankenhausen), undated.

⁸⁹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the Bonifatiusverein (Fulda), 10/7/46.

⁹⁰ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen’, Freusberg, 1/7/46.

⁹¹ On other measures see: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

Despite all measures, there were still much fewer priests than were required and many Catholic communities felt neglect and a sense of abandonment. In and around Bilzingsleben, for instance, there were 1,155 Catholics, most of whom were evacuees. Clergy in nearby regions were only on rare occasions able to conduct mass and services. As a temporary measure, one of the community members took church service on Sundays. Most hoped that this was not an enduring situation and, after the *Karfreitag* sermon (the Friday before Easter), one wrote:

I am bound to say that there were many tears in eyes and that, it was protested to me, it would be their poorest Easter celebration without a Holy Mass... We ask most urgently that you send a priest to us that we, here, are not completely abandoned.⁹²

At the recovery of a sick clergyman at Bad Sachsa, Freusberg acknowledged the considerable impact of the priest's absence in pastoral care and commented: 'We lament that our efforts for the continuation of settled pastoral care have not up to now been successful.'⁹³

The 'catastrophic' lack of clergy and the exhausting demands placed on existing priests lasted well beyond the period treated here. A report prepared by Freusberg in May 1948 observed that the situation could be improved if the number of churchmen was increased by 'at least' 30. The situation in Thuringia, however, was not unique, and he continued: 'The pastoral care of the evacuees today has become a problem for the entire German

⁹² BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bilzingsleben (Leo Szelma) to Bishop Johannes Dietz (Fulda), 5/6/46; see also: BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47.

⁹³ BEA, Stellenakten, Freusberg to Bad Sachsa, 15/12/47.

Church.’⁹⁴ Even by 1949, the Catholic Church had still not come to terms with the critical situation that it faced.⁹⁵

Although less severe and less documented than Catholic Church, the TeK also suffered from a lack of clergymen. Requiring hundreds of pastors at the end of the war, the TeK implemented a number of measures which raised the number from 362 in 1944 to 794 in mid-1947.⁹⁶ The LKR went about alleviating the need in much the same way as the Catholic Church. Evacuee pastors, for example, were placed in operation throughout Thuringia and, in a report to the Office of the EKD in mid-1947, Mitzenheim placed their number at 200.⁹⁷ Other pastors returned from Allied captivity and the LKR also allowed the appointment of helpers placed under the authority of the clergy; these numbered 40 in mid-1946.⁹⁸

However, like the Catholic Church, pastors were often laden with excessive burdens that compromised their effectiveness.⁹⁹ One clergyman from Truckenbrodt, Pastor Pokojowski, stated his need was such that he could barely support himself and was forced to beg to ensure his existence.¹⁰⁰ The same was the case with pastors in the *Thüringer Wald* region following the harsh winter of 1945/1946 – many were undernourished and

⁹⁴ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Übersicht über die Diaspora-Seelsorge der evakuierten Katholiken im thüringischen Anteil der Diözese Fulda’, Freusberg, 7/5/48.

⁹⁵ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Freusberg to Bishop Johannes Dietz (Fulda), 16/4/49; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Mellenbach, 15/11/48; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Melchendorf, 13/11/48.

⁹⁶ LKAE, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁹⁷ LKAE, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47; cf. LKAE, A 122 XVI, 4, 10/7/45; LKAE, A 593 I, 30, the EKD to the LKR, 4/11/47; LKAE, A 616a, 1937-1951, 1947; LKAE, A 130 II, ‘Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht des aufsichtführenden Oberkirchenrates des Bezirkes Mitte über das Jahr 1946’, Dr. Schanze, 12/2/47; C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 17.

⁹⁸ Ingo Braecklein, Mitzenheim’s successor as TeK Landesbischof, returned to Allendorf from captivity in the West in 1945: H. Findeis, D. Pollack (eds.), pp.43-44; LKAE, A 122 XVI, 164-165, 11/1/46; LKAE, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁹⁹ M. Greschat, ‘Vorgeschichte’, p. 15; LKAE, A 130 II, ‘Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht des aufsichtführenden Oberkirchenrates des Bezirkes Mitte über das Jahr 1946’, Dr. Schanze, 12/2/47; see also: C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁰ LKAE, A 240 IV, 129, Truckenbrodt (Altenburg), Pokojowski to Mitzenheim, 16/8/47.

went without food.¹⁰¹ Both churches adopted a number of measures to deal with the lack of clergy, yet in most cases these were merely stop-gaps that only slightly ameliorated the situation without solving it. Even by the end of 1948, both churches were still not able to provide all communities in Thuringia with churchmen.

Other church needs and material care

Apart from inadequate buildings, or no buildings at all, and a lack of clergy, the churches also did not possess materials critical to services and other public duties. A number of articles central to religious observances were particularly sought-after including bibles, catechisms, singing books, liturgical books ('theologic literature' as one report, in English, noted) and other cultic items such as goblets for mass and monstrance.¹⁰² Mass wine and candles were also often lacking; a directive from the TeK advised that, for mass, wine should be mixed with water as 'in the time of Jesus', and when wine lacked, fruit wine with water, and when that was lacking, water alone was to be used.¹⁰³ Where religious objects were not at hand in local Catholic churches, evangelical equivalents were sometimes employed. Still, these were merely stop-gaps and the parishes relied heavily on outside help.¹⁰⁴ The work of distributing catechisms in Thuringia was described by one priest as 'the most important apostolic activity'.¹⁰⁵ There were donations from external sources such as the Bonifatius Union and *Caritas* in physical

¹⁰¹ T. Björkman (ed.), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰² *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47; 'theologic literature: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated; see also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Kirchliche Verhältnisse in Thüringen', Freusberg, 1/7/46; literature lacking at Gräfenroda, *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946'; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 1947-1950, Abgewandertenseelsorge, Bad Frankenhausen, Easter 1947; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bad Frankenhausen to the BGVF, Easter 1947.

¹⁰³ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundsreiben, 5/48, 7/2/48.

¹⁰⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated.

¹⁰⁵ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Erfurt to Weihbischof Adolf Bollte (Fulda), 24/10/47.

materials and funds for the remuneration of select priests whose contributions to the pastoral care of refugees were significant.¹⁰⁶ The American Bible Society also provided the appreciative TeK with 2,880 bibles.¹⁰⁷ Despite the generous donations, however, by no means were all needs met.¹⁰⁸

The material care of the refugees and native Thuringians was another paramount concern for the churches. Church efforts were energetic. Once more, however, the Catholic Church – with its vastly inflated community – simply could not provide the material needs for all.¹⁰⁹ Most refugees bore with them only the bare necessities and, in many cases, this was nothing but what was on their backs. A report from Riethnordhausen and Hassleben described a common situation amongst the evacuees:

Women with small children were not able to carry other luggage as they had a child in their arms... The men also were too weakened by the long march to bear a heavy case and [they] became so apathetic and indifferent that they had to leave their few [bits of] luggage lying in the ditch at the side of the road because they [could] scarcely still haul themselves on.¹¹⁰

The most basic needs – food, adequate clothing, shoes and wood in winter – were often lacking.¹¹¹ So too was clothing for infants and young children.¹¹² Many of the refugees

¹⁰⁶ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 10/4/47.

¹⁰⁷ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn), 30/1/47; *LKAE*, A 750 IV, Mitzenheim to Dr. Eric North (New York) and M. Olivier Beguin (Geneva), undated (probably mid-1947).

¹⁰⁸ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 126, the Bonifatiusverein (Paderborn) to Freusberg, 2/6/48.

¹⁰⁹ For example, at Bilzingsleben: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47.

¹¹⁰ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'B[ericht] über die [soziale Verh]ältnisse der Umsiedler in den Gemeinden Riethnordhausen und Hassleben', undated (probably early 1947); see also: F. Behr, p. 65; E. Babstübner-Peters, p. 29; B. Andrees, p. 111.

¹¹¹ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 1943-1949, H. Muschalek (Erfurt) to the BGVF, 18/10/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die seelsorglich-caritativen Verhältnisse in Seelsorgsbezirk Erfurt-Ost (Linderbach)', undated (probably early 1947); *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über das Jahr 1947', Alach/Ringleben; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Bad Salza to the BGVF, 11/12/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Jahresbericht der Seelsorgsstelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946'; H. Siebert, p. 157; F. Behr, pp. 54, 64.

¹¹² *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 19/48, 16/11/48; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 6/48, 19/2/48.

could only be housed *en masse*, often for months on end. For example, at Neudietendorf an entire community of Croats was housed in the local women's school. In addition, whilst some evacuees managed to find employment, the labour was often only the most onerous and exhausting. It was widely recognised that 'they [refugees] are in the greatest need'.¹¹³

The churches and, in some cases, individual communities were involved in charity and aid organisations with the express purposes of alleviating need and giving comfort in representation of the love of God.¹¹⁴ Pastors were required to offer material as well as spiritual care.¹¹⁵ There were collections taken throughout Thuringia for the work of *Hilfswerk* (the evangelical aid agency established in October 1945), in the care of infants, orphans, the sick, the dumb and also the elderly in an attempt to lighten their burden in the 'twilight of life'.¹¹⁶ The Catholic aid organisation, *Caritas*, and its Protestant counterparts, *Innere Mission* and *Hilfswerk*, were heavily involved in post-war Thuringia in the care of the needy and poor.¹¹⁷ *Caritas*, *Innere Mission* and *Hilfswerk* devoted much of their energies to charity work at the train stations where the need was greatest.¹¹⁸ The Train Station Mission (Bahnhofsmission) was an important initiative due to the great

¹¹³ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'B[ericht] über die [soziale Verh]ältnisse der Umsiedler in den Gemeinden Riethnordhausen und Hassleben', undated (probably early 1947); BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die sozial-wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse in Ringleben und Gebesee, Krs. Weissensee', undated (probably early 1947); DAW, BKM, K2 5.4, Meiningen to Domkapitular Brande, 24/2/47.

¹¹⁴ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVE, 25/4/47; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Suhl to the BGVE, 5//47; GuH, 1/1, 21/4/46, 'Am Fuße der Wartburg', Superintendent H. Elle (Jena), p.2; GuH, 1/10, 30/6/46, 'Christliche Verantwortung gegenüber Kranken und Leidenden', Behr (Arnstadt), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 34/47, 23/12/47.

¹¹⁶ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 19/48, 16/11/48; EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 20/48, 7/12/48; EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 8/47, 27/3/47; EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 7/46, 5/9/46; the appointment of Pf. Phieler as the head of Hilfswerk in Thuringia: EZAB, 4/116, 25/9/45; see also: GuH, 1/11, 7/7/46, 'Helfende Hände steuern der Not. Vom Hilfswerk der Thüringer Kirche in Eisenach', Massow, p. 3; GuH, 1/32, 1/12/46, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p. 3.

¹¹⁷ R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 73; H. Siebert, pp. 65-67; W. Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, pp. 26-27; G. Niemczik, pp. 32-40.

¹¹⁸ DAW, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert oder mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984, p. 40; LKAE, A 700, 'Die Innere Mission und Ihre Werke sind in Thüringen verfassungsmäßig unmittelbarer Lebensäußerungen der Kirche', Mitzenheim to Hans Asmussen (EKD), 11/1/47; LKAE, A 700, the LKR to the pastorate, 7/9/48.

number of poverty-stricken persons who arrived in trains from the East with nowhere to go.¹¹⁹ Shelters were erected, food was distributed, counsel dispensed and sermons were preached.¹²⁰ The process was simple: the evacuees were greeted on arrival, cleaned, given food, shelter and then a passage from the bible by a clergyman who remained with them until all formal procedures had been completed.¹²¹ By the end of 1945, for example, the Eichsfeld *Caritas* had provided for 157,386 refugees and others in need of aid.¹²² Despite great efforts, nonetheless, not all need was alleviated.¹²³

In other humanitarian work, the Catholic Church at Erfurt worked closely with the Housing Office (Unterkunftsamt) in order to provide shelter to the homeless, as well as attempting to locate missing family members.¹²⁴ The Catholic and Protestant churches were also involved in the management of hospitals. At Erfurt, despite considerable damage, the hospital was repaired and staffed to accommodate 350 patients.¹²⁵ The Catholic churches in the Erfurt region also administered orphanages and old people's

¹¹⁹ *LKAE*, A 701 III, 20, 'Die Arbeit und die Entwicklung unserer Thüringer Bahnhofsmmissionen seit 1945', 6/4/1950; *LKAE*, A 701 III, 69, Rundschreiben (Phieler), 11/9/46; *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert oder mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984, p. 40.

¹²⁰ *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert oder mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984, p. 40; *LKAE*, A 701 III, 20, 'Die Arbeit und die Entwicklung unserer Thüringer Bahnhofsmmissionen seit 1945', 6/4/1950; *LKAE*, A 701 III, 87, 12/12/48.

¹²¹ *LKAE*, A 701 III, 20, 'Die Arbeit und die Entwicklung unserer Thüringer Bahnhofsmmissionen seit 1945', 6/4/1950; *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert oder mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984, p. 40.

¹²² H. Siebert, p. 66; *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the Russian commandant of Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 8/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46; on Caritas in Southern Thuringia see, in general: *DAW*, Bestand Dokumentation – Personen, Nachlaß Robert Kümmert, 'Frustriert or mitten in Leben, Erinnerungen von Pfr. Robert Kümmert', 1984; *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 34, 'Die Würzburger Diaspora in der russischen Zone. Stand und Sicherungsmaßnahmen', 4/2/48; *DAW*, BKM, K2 0.2.5, 'Zusammenfassung', undated.

¹²³ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVE, 25/4/47; *DAW*, BKM, K2 0.2.5, 'Zusammenfassung', undated.

¹²⁴ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the Russian commandant of Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 2/8/48; cf. earlier: *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the Russian commandant of Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 14/3/46.

¹²⁵ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Bericht über die kirchliche Lage', Freusberg to the Russian commandant of Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 2/8/46.

homes; in Protestant parishes, *Innere Mission* and *Hilfswerk* did likewise.¹²⁶ Often enough, local parishes also cooperated with the state-run *Volkssolidarität* organization. For example, the Catholic community at Alach received a new year's telegram in recognition of its efforts.¹²⁷ Despite the enduring need, the involvement of the churches throughout the social strata was energetic and near complete.

Conclusion

The greatest issue faced by the Catholic Church immediately after the end of the Second World War was providing for the large number of refugees who sought refuge within its walls. From the outset, one report noted that at least 3,500 believers in the Erfurt region lacked pastoral and caritative care.¹²⁸ The situation of the Catholic Church in Thuringia was not unusual, although the experience of each territory in the SBZ differed significantly. Catholic refugees flooded into other territories of the Soviet zone, particularly Saxony, in 1945 and 1946. The diocese of Meissen, which was located to the east of Thuringia, struggled with a severe lack of chapels *vis-à-vis* the considerable Catholic population.¹²⁹ Otherwise, relatively few refugees settled in Berlin because of a ban on entering the city.¹³⁰ Everywhere church hospitals and aid agencies kicked into action and were recognised by the Russians as vital for sustaining the population. In particular, despite financial difficulties, *Caritas* and the Protestant aid organisations were active throughout the SBZ.¹³¹

¹²⁶ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the Russian commandant of Erfurt (Lt. Kolosenko), 2/8/48; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 20/48, 7/12/48; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 7/47, 26/3/47; *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 2/46, 6/6/46; *EZAB*, 2/148, 999, 8/5/46; *seelsorge* to the deaf: *LKAE*, A 550 II, Superintendent Mehlhorn to the LKR, 11/3/46; *LKAE*, A 550 II, the LKR to Mehlhorn, undated (probably mid 1946).

¹²⁷ *BEA*, Stellenakten, Alach, Volkssolidarität Thüringen (Alach) to the Alach parish, 30/12/46; cf. some conflict: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage', Freusberg, 9/8/46.

¹²⁸ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, Erfurt, 30/4/45; cf. H. Siebert, pp. 67-69.

¹²⁹ B. Mitzscherlich, pp. 562-563.

¹³⁰ W. Tischner, pp. 45-46.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60, 387ff.

Post-war institutional Catholicism in Thuringia was a predominantly introverted body that utilised the freedom granted to it by the Russians almost exclusively in order to care for its faithful. The stated aim of the Catholic Church in Thuringia in this period was to ensure that believers hold fast to their faith in what was an extremely testing environment. The Catholic Church expended much effort in seeking to realise this aim. As shown in chapter two, the SMATh offered the churches a great deal of religious freedom and this allowed them, and the Catholic Church in particular, to try as best as they could to help the refugees. In the Catholic Church, the framework was put in place through the division of existing parishes into more manageable areas, the leasing of evangelical churches, the recruitment of clergy and the general physical and spiritual care of refugees through charity and community work. Both churches sought to provide material and spiritual care which was indispensable to the population at large and which established the important post-war position of the churches.

However, the measures of the Catholic Church were not always effective, and, despite significant efforts, it was not able to deal with the enormous task placed before it. Many people lacked spiritual and material consolation as a result. The greatest inadequacy of the churches was the clergy. They were considered the heart of the faith community and, with the enduring need, no amount of zeal could paper over the inadequacies of the churches and the Catholic Church especially. A report from Bilzingsleben observed that ‘even the greatest idealism cannot help [when] the most fundamental living conditions are lacking’.¹³² In not being able to serve the entire community – especially in pastoral care, the most important tool in espousing Christian doctrine and living to common folk – the churches lost influence and valuable spiritual ground to secularism. In fact, a result of the enduring need and inability of the churches up to at least 1948 to address the deprivation was that the popularity enjoyed by the churches in 1945 waned considerably thereafter.

¹³² BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

4: Church popularity and stagnation, 1945-1948

In 1945, the church leadership had great hopes that a long-term process of 'secularisation' in Germany could be superseded by a 're-Christianisation' of the population.¹ The early signs were positive. In fact, the churches enjoyed almost unprecedented popularity in the first months after the end of the Second World War. They offered consolation and stability in difficult times and a hope that trying post-war conditions would soon be alleviated.

Almost all historians agree that there was a religious revival after the war. Church services and other ceremonies were well attended both in the western zones and the SBZ.² Historians are therefore quick to point out the importance and influence of the churches in the immediate aftermath of the war, but most neglect to analyse to what degree this popularity was enduring beyond 1945. Thomas A. Seidel does note that religious enthusiasm subsided somewhat after a short period of occupation but does so only with one summary sentence in three separate texts.³ Clemens Vollnhals also states

¹ *Bayerischer Tag*, 11/8/1945; M. Greschat, 'Kontinuität und Neuanfang...', p. 91; Kurt Meier, 'Volkskirchlicher Neuaufbau in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone', in: *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, eds. V. Konzernius, M. Greschat et al, (Göttingen: 1988), p. 213; M. Greschat, 'Kirche und Öffentlichkeit...', pp. 100-102; C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', pp. 113-114, 144-146; T. A. Seidel, 'Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen...', p. 90; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 27; D. van Melis, 'Der Katholische Episkopat und die Entnazifizierung', pp. 42, 68-69; C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, pp. 41-44; K. Repgen, p. 136ff.

² C. Kleßmann, *Die Doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955*, (Göttingen: 1982), p. 59; M. Malzahn (ed.), pp. 94-97; Dennis L. Bark, David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany. Volume I: From Shadow to Substance 1945-1963*, (Oxford: 1989), p. 145ff; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 21; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 71-72; M. Greschat, 'Kontinuität und Neuanfang...', p. 86; K. Herbert, p. 15; C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 114; T. A. Seidel, "...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart"..., pp. 169-170; T. A. Seidel, 'Befreiung oder Besatzung?...', p. 5; T. Koch, p. 10; D. van Melis, p. 68; H. Glaser, *1945. Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 330.

³ T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 72; T. A. Seidel, "...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart"..., p. 170; T. A. Seidel, 'Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen...', pp. 90-91.

that, in West Germany, after a brief increase in the popularity of the churches, this had ebbed away by 1947.⁴ As for the historiography of the Catholic Church, Konrad Repgen writes that there had been great hopes for a revival in post-war Germany, and, in many places, this occurred in 1945 and 1946. By 1947 and 1948, the appeal of the churches had largely diminished and German Catholicism was in crisis.⁵ Few historians, nonetheless, have attempted to explain the apparent decline in religious enthusiasm during the period of the occupation and there is little historiography on church popularity until 1949. In contrast, there is significant work on the great decline in church membership in the GDR.⁶

It is the intention of this chapter to explore the idea of a religious revival in 1945 and its longevity. To what extent did the popularity of the Thuringian churches endure from 1945 until 1948? This analysis is important for two reasons. It allows, first of all, an insight into how comprehensively the churches managed to exert their influence on the population at large and achieve the hoped-for 're-Christianisation'. Second, the interest or disinterest in the churches from 1945 to 1948 represented the background to the significant drop in church membership from 1949 and may thus allow an insight into why membership plummeted in the GDR.

While the picture of religious revival was largely consistent in 1945, it was much more contradictory by 1948. A number of churches reported good attendance while others complained of slack observance in religious ceremonies. This ambiguity indicated, to some extent, a decline in the appeal of the churches and, in light of the figures, a failed

⁴ C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 151.

⁵ K. Repgen, pp. 140-141.

⁶ See, for example, Detlef Pollack, 'Von der Volkskirche zur Minderheitskirche. Zur Entwicklung von Religiosität und Kirchlichkeit in der DDR', in: *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, eds. H. Kaelble, J. Kocka, H. Zwahr, (Stuttgart: 1994), pp. 271-294; Karl-Fritz Daiber, 'Kirche und religiöse Gemeinschaften in der DDR', in: *Religion, Kirchen und Gesellschaft in Deutschland*, eds. F.-X. Kaufmann, B. Schäfer, (Opladen: 1988), pp. 75-88; Ehrhart Neubert, 'Von der Volkskirche zur Minderheitskirche: Bilanz 1990', in: *Die Rolle der Kirchen in der DDR: eine erste Bilanz*, ed. H. Dähn, (Munich: 1993), pp. 36-55; Wolfgang Büscher, 'Unterwegs zur Minderheit: eine Auswertung konfessionsstatistischer Daten', in: *Die evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR. Beiträge zu einer Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. R. Henkys, (Munich: 1982), pp. 422-436.

attempt at 're-Christianisation'. The churches were ultimately unable to influence the population to attend church services and be more actively involved in religious life. This analysis poses one further question: why did popular interest in churches decline?

'Zero Hour'

The churches were very popular in the first months after the end of the war throughout Germany.⁷ It was no different in Thuringia, as locals and foreign observers alike recognised. A pastor from Gera, Ernst Deter, noted in a letter dating from May 1945 that there was a 'frightening rise' in church life.⁸ Mitzenheim confirmed this in a July letter to his Saxon counterpart by stating there was an 'unmistakable, definite upswing' in the churches.⁹ A foreign witness in July 1945 remarked that the number of church services was growing and attendance was greatly on the increase.¹⁰ Even Methodist churches were packed.¹¹ In the German Evangelical Church, the low number of exits in 1945 (approximately 10,000 in contrast to around 24,000 in 1944) were comparable only to the conflict years of World War One and before 1906.¹² Similarly, far more people joined the TeK in 1945 than left it: 2,358 people entered the Church and 2,334 apostates re-entered the Church while only 97 left.¹³ Such was the revival in 1945 that, as one pastor observed in December, there had never previously been so many people seeking the consolation of the churches.¹⁴

⁷ M. Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', pp. 14-15; W-D. Hauschild, p. 301; R. Mau, *Der Protestantismus im Osten Deutschlands...*, p. 21; T. A. Seidel, "'...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart'..."', p. 169; M. Greschat, 'Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung...', p. 112; T. A. Seidel, 'Befreiung oder Besatzung?...', p. 35; K. Herbert, p. 15; T. A. Seidel, 'Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen...', p. 90; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 69-70

⁸ LKAE, A 130 II, Hermann Ernst Deter to Mitzenheim, 31/5/45.

⁹ LKAE, A 239 III, Mitzenheim to Lau (Sachsen), 20/7/45 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, pp. 17, 143; T. A. Seidel, "'...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart'..."', pp. 169-170.

¹¹ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 143.

¹² KJ, 1950, p. 382.

¹³ EZAB, 2/149, A154/15.11.45; cf. KJ, 1950, p. 382ff.

¹⁴ LKAE, A 239 III, 170, Johannes Rabe to Mitzenheim, 10/12/45.

The popularity of the churches was shown through strong church attendances and participation in religious ceremonies. The *Bürgermeister* at Geismar, for example, commented on the voluminous involvement in church life in his town.¹⁵ Holungen celebrated the Day of John (the Baptist) on 25 June with particular vigour and Worbis observed *Antoniustag* with an ‘enormous’ crowd of people on pilgrimage.¹⁶ Immediately after American occupation, large numbers attended the *Fronleichsnamprozession* in most places.¹⁷ Traditional practices such as mass were also very popular. A report noted that the singing of post-war mass at Saalfeld, for instance, was hearty and dedicated.¹⁸ The local church at Allendorf became the hub of the community whilst packed services were held in a barn at Bienstädt.¹⁹ In addition, while the evangelical community amongst university students at Jena was small at the end of the Nazi era, it grew rapidly after the war and meetings were well attended.²⁰ Such was the popularity of religion that one pastor urged Mitzenheim to adopt a ‘certain generosity’ (*Großzügigkeit*) in putting aside other issues, such as denazification, in favour of focusing church energies on the many seeking spiritual consolation.²¹

While all general comments maintained that, on the whole, the popularity of the churches was great in the initial post-war period, there were certainly some localities where this does not seem to have been the case. That people fell away from the churches and did not

¹⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Geismar, p. 171; see also: H. Siebert, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Kriegsende...*, Holungen, p. 239.

¹⁷ *BEA*, C II a 16, 1945-1953, SMATh, Freusberg to the American occupation authorities in Erfurt, 2/6/45; H. Siebert, p. 28.

¹⁸ *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 28, ‘Abschrift aus dem Tagebuch der Frau Katharina Link gewesene Studienrätin, Mutter des Herrn Pfr. Hans Link, 1945’, 3/5/45; *EZAB*, 2/148, A154, 15/11/45.

¹⁹ H. Findeis, D. Pollack (eds.), pp. 51-52; Günther Zähner, ‘Thüringer Blickpunkte 1933-1945 aus der Sicht eines Dorfpfarrers damaliger Zeit’, in: *Thüringer Gratwanderungen...*, pp. 244-255.

²⁰ *LKAE*, A 590 I, Pf. Walter Pabst to Mitzenheim (also Dr. Schanze), 23/7/47; *GuH*, 2/38, 21/9/47, ‘Die evangelische Studentengemeinde in Jena’, Pf. W. Pabst, p. 2.

²¹ *LKAE*, A 239 III, 170, Johannes Rabe to Mitzenheim, 10/12/45.

believe in God or disregarded the directives of the religious authorities is no surprise.²² The destruction wreaked by the war left people destitute and made it difficult for them to have faith in a benevolent God. One church official observed, looking back, that while some believed that the catastrophic end of the war would have positive effects for the Christian Church in turning people to prayer and the Christian gospel, the opposite was the reality and the hearts of many people had turned ‘stony’ and ‘icy’.²³ At Buchenwald after the war ‘the questions for most men are: “If there is a God, how can he allow all this, and what meaning is there behind it all?”’.²⁴ The priest at Lenterode remarked also that secularism was manifest in lawlessness and anarchy.²⁵ On the basis of the sources, however, the evidence for a *general* increase in church popularity in the immediate post-war period is more persuasive than that which suggests there was never a spike in religious enthusiasm in 1945.

The Catholic statistical handbook stated, in accounting for the revival in 1945, that many wanted to wash themselves clean of the ‘taint’ of the Nazi period.²⁶ This is highly unlikely, however, as there was a general lack of guilt amongst faith communities and the German population at large after the war (see below, p. 70-74). The sudden popularity of the churches was instead due to two reasons. Firstly, the rise in enthusiasm in the churches was a consequence of the almost unimpeded religious freedom which was not available during the war years. For instance, places where church life had been restricted often experienced a renewed interest and involvement in religious ceremonies. Obstacles to the observance of rituals were removed and people were safe and thankful. Many communities believed that divine power had brought them through the war unmolested or

²² *GuH*, 1/33, 8/12/46, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Heimkehrer und Kirche’, Dr. Albert Hiß, p. 2; see also: *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, ‘Ewigkeit in die Zeit – Lätare’, Lic. Geinrich, p. 1; *GuH*, 2/22, 1/6/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; E. Stegmann, p. 110.

²³ *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, ‘Der kalte Verstand und das warme Herz’, Grams, p. 2.

²⁴ Wolfgang Eichler, *Ein Wort ging um in Buchenwald: Erlebnisbericht aus den Jahren 1945 bis 1950*, (Jena: 1992), pp. 18-19; see also: Bodo Ritscher (ed.), *Speziallager Nr. 2 Buchenwald*, (Buchenwald: 1993), pp. 88, 93.

²⁵ *Kriegsende...*, Lenterode, pp. 282-284; cf. *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, ‘Weg aus dem Chaos’, Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Griez), p. 4.

²⁶ *KH*, 1944-51, p. 301.

at least alive.²⁷ Expressions of thankfulness to God, Jesus and the Virgin Mary are myriad amongst accounts of the war's end in Thuringia and particularly in Eichsfeld. At Kefferhausen, despite considerable damage to the local church and the nearby vicarage, it was understood that God and Mary had preserved the community.²⁸ Elsewhere, the population at Küllstedt believed that it was under the protection of Mary, Joseph and the saints George and Antonius.²⁹ There were also many expressions of *Gott sei Dank* and one man even gave the Heiligenstadt Provost, Adolf Bolte, twenty *Reichsmarks* in gratitude for God's protection.³⁰

The popularity of Christianity in 1945 also had much to do with *mentalité*. Almost all reports agree that the tremendous need and uncertainty of the post-war period did not deter communities from belief.³¹ Many in the population believed that secular National Socialism had brought defeat and disaster upon Germany. The collapse of this regime awakened interest in a 'new Christian life' that was appealing by contrast.³² In the difficult situation caused by the anti-religious spirit of Nazism, the Christian Church offered meaning and the hope of a brighter future to those in great need of consolation.³³ A desire for direction led many, in the absence of formal state and administrative structures, to the churches as the only remaining mass institutions. There was solace in their perceived stability.³⁴ One foreign observer noted that in such an inhospitable

²⁷ See especially: H. Siebert, p. 28; G. Braune (ed.), p. 98 (Edeltraut F.), p. 148 (Friedel D.).

²⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Kefferhausen, p. 254.

²⁹ *Kriegsende...*, Küllstedt, p. 270.

³⁰ H. Siebert, p. 23; E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, p. 114; *Kriegsende...*, Effelder, p. 158; Geismar, pp. 169-170; Heiligenstadt, p. 195; Neustadt, p. 295; Reinhalterode, p. 299; Leinefelde, p. 271; Wiesenfeld, p. 341 (2); Worbis, p. 354.

³¹ *LKAE*, A 240 IV, 129, Truckenbrodt (Altenburg), Pokojowski to Mitzenheim, 16/8/47; *LKAE*, A 130 II, Beiakten, 1947-1953, 139, 29/10/47; *GuH*, 2/31, 3/8/47, 'Heiliges Leid', p. 2.

³² *GuH*, 1/31, 24/11/46, 'Sterbende Kirche?', p. 1; C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 114; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 330.

³³ See, in general: R. Wenzel (ed.), pp. 75-76; M. Greschat, 'Kontinuität und Neuanfang...', p. 86; Hellmut Nitsche, *Zwischen Kreuz und Sowjetstern: Zeugnisse der Kirchenkampfes in der DDR (1945-1981)*, (Aschaffenburg: 1983), pp. 17-18; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 330.

³⁴ *KJ*, 1950, p. 381; E. Neubert, 'Kirchenpolitik', p. 372; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 69-70; D. L. Bark, D. R. Gress, pp. 145-146; C. Kleßmann, *Die Doppelte Staatsgründung...*, p. 59; K.

environment there was much room for the comfort offered by the Christian gospel.³⁵ A pastor further commented that people did not seek eloquent sermons but rather sought clarity and ‘light in darkness’ that would offer them ‘consolation, strength and steadfastness in all [the] sufferings of the day’.³⁶ There was a strong belief that, as God had brought people through the war with their lives intact, harsh post-war conditions would be overcome and life itself would improve.³⁷ The Geisleden *Bürgermeister* asserted that the community would not abandon hope, which was a gift of God, and that hope would ultimately lead to a better time.³⁸ One woman summed up the support of the churches in this way: ‘If one had no faith and no trust in God, one would be already smashed under the weight of this suffering.’³⁹

Enduring popularity in places

Despite the largely consistent picture of popular interest in the churches in the immediate post-war period, there is much more ambiguity about how long this appeal endured after 1945. Some reports confirmed that people continued to flock enthusiastically to church services and ceremonies while others stated that many became indifferent to religion.

In many places, the initial popularity of the churches lasted beyond 1945. One indicator of this was that the Catholic Church continued, as noted above, to have significant problems with a lack of clergy. There were simply not enough clergymen to keep up with

Herbert, p. 15; T. A. Seidel, “‘...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart’...”, p. 169; T. A. Seidel, ‘Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche in Thüringen...’, p. 90.

³⁵ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 12.

³⁶ *GuH*, 1/2, 5/5/46, ‘Andacht: Misericordias Domini’, Schröter (Altenburg), p. 1; M. Greschat, ‘Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung...’, pp. 112-113.

³⁷ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 11 and p. 48; H. Findeis, D. Pollack (eds.), p. 332; T. Björkman (ed.), p. 31; *GuH*, 1/5, 26/5/46, ‘Vergebung – Einigkeit – Bruderschaft’, p. 1; *GuH*, 1/4, 19/5/46, ‘Andacht: Dennoch!’, p. 1; *GuH*, 1/6, 2/6/46, ‘Der lebendige Choral – ein Stück kirchlichen Lebens’, W. Vollrath (Gera), p. 3.

³⁸ *Kriegsende...*, Geisladen, p. 168.

³⁹ *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Frau Michaelis and Frau Müller to Mitzenheim, 17/6/48; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 265, Helene Müller (Pössneck) to Mitzenheim, 21/9/48.

the demand, even beyond 1948.⁴⁰ Church services also remained well attended. Even multiple Sunday services were not sufficient and parishioners spilled out of the doors into the streets such that some had to return to their homes. In Rudolstadt during 1948, for instance, there were four services every Sunday and six in Meiningen.⁴¹ There was an increase in church services throughout ‘nearly all’ of the Pastoral Care Stations in the area of Southern Thuringia. Three or more Sunday services were common.⁴² The people who attended services at Alach and Reinholterode furthermore were voluminous and the singing was reportedly enthusiastic.⁴³ Attendance at services at Zella-Mehlis attracted up to 80 percent of the total Catholics in the region, a figure in excess of 2,000.⁴⁴ Attendance was ‘very satisfactory’ in the Königsee parish, while the evangelical Schmölln district enjoyed a vibrant church life throughout 1946.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, in a number of areas in Thuringia, participation in Protestant church services and celebrations in 1946 and 1947 was variously described as ‘numerous’, ‘good’ and ‘satisfactory’.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 126, 1943-1951, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Flottenberg), 30/1/47.

⁴¹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Rudolstadt parish to the Protestant Superintendent of Rudolstadt, 8/5/48; *DAW*, BKM, K4: Geschichtliche Dokumentation, 32, ‘Bericht über die Fahrt des Caritas Direktors der Diözese Würzburg in die Diaspora in Süd-Thüringen vom 20 Mai-2 Juni 1948’; also see: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Goldenes Jubiläum der Gemeinde Sondershausen’; *LKAE*, A 610, 20, ‘Bericht über das Ergebnis der Rundfrage betr. Verhältnis der Konfessionen im Bereiche der TeK, (Juni 1947)’, 26/1/1948; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Freusberg to the BGVP, 11/2/47; *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47.

⁴² *DAW*, BKM, K2 0.2.5, ‘Zusammenfassung’, undated.

⁴³ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, Stellenakten, Alach, ‘Geschichte der Stelle’, Anna Ossig, 1985; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Reinholterode to the BGVP, 24/3/46.

⁴⁴ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946 (Zella-Mehlis)’, 20/1/47.

⁴⁵ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Königsee to the BGVP, 8/11/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht über meine Seelsorgstätigkeit in Leutenberg im Jahre 1946’, 2/1/47; *BFA*, BGVP, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Kefferhausen (Bürgermeisteramt) to the BGVP, 16/6/47; *GuH*, 1/6, 2/6/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; cf. *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *GuH*, 1/22, 22/9/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Sondershausen), p. 3; *GuH*, 1/26, 20/10/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Sondershausen), p. 3; ‘zahlreich’: *GuH*, 1/24, 6/10/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Jena), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/12, 23/3/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Gotha), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/13, 30/3/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Dermbach), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, ‘Singet dem Herrn ein neues Leid – Zum Sonntag “Kantate”’, Prof. G. Brieger, p. 3; *GuH*, 2/26, 29/6/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Erfurt), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/27, 6/7/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Schleiz), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/32, 10/8/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Lucka), p. 3; *GuH*, 2/36, 7/9/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; *GuH*, 2/46, 16/11/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Ilmenau), p. 3.

Services linked to Catholic mission drives also were often popular. The Silberhausen mission services at the end of 1947 were attended by 99 percent of the Catholic population of 982.⁴⁷ The Uder mission was greeted with ‘extremely zealous’ visitors to sermons.⁴⁸ Participation in the Bad Frankenhausen mission in 1948 was good and a ‘refresher mission’ was planned for 1949.⁴⁹ Attendance was high also at Birkenfelde, Thalwenden and Schönhagen in the Heiligenstadt deaconate. According to the mission report: ‘In all three towns the believers liked to come to the individual sermons and particular rites...and were zealous despite snow, ice and cold [temperatures].’⁵⁰

Other church ceremonies too drew significant numbers after 1945. Christmas in particular was an extremely religious period and services attracted a great many people throughout Thuringia from 1945 to 1948.⁵¹ Recently created Pastoral Care Stations were swamped and priests were not able to cope, especially with the demand for confessions. The *Leidensprozession* in Eichsfeld also attracted between 8,000 and 10,000 people on an annual basis.⁵² Various other Catholic processions throughout Thuringia were very popular.⁵³ Participation in the annual evangelical ‘Bible Week’ was significant in places and large numbers, including 1,400 at Jena, attended services on the 400th anniversary of Martin Luther’s death on 18 February 1946.⁵⁴ One report from Büttstadt observed that on

⁴⁷ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Fragebogen betreffend Mission’, Silberhausen, 1/12/47; see also: BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Silberhausen to the BGVP, 4/12/47; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Silberhausen to the BGVP, 11/12/47.

⁴⁸ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Fragebogen betreffend Mission’, Uder/Eichsfeld, 5/5/47; see also: BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Fragebogen betreffend Mission’, Holungen, 25/6/46; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Kirchgandern to the BGVP, 13/4/48.

⁴⁹ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, Stellenakten, Bad Frankenhausen, ‘Bericht über die Mission’, 6/6/48-4/7/48.

⁵⁰ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, Stellenakten, Birkenfelde, ‘Bericht über die “hl. Mission”’, 10/6/47.

⁵¹ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 126, 1943-1951, Freusberg to the Bonifatiusverein (Flottenberg), 30/1/47; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht’, Bilzingsleben to the BGVP, 25/4/47; GuH, 2/52, 28/12/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, (Sup. Eisenach), p. 3.

⁵² H. Siebert, p. 117.

⁵³ For example the Maria Schness Fest in Schleid: BFA, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Bonifatiusbote, 29/9/46; BFA, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Spahl to the BGVP, 29/9/45.

⁵⁴ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 15/47, 9/7/47; see also: EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschriften, 21/47, 22/8/47; celebrations of Palm Sunday (for example) in Gotha: GuH, 1/4, 19/5/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; GuH, 1/1, 21/4/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik. Landeskirchliche Lutherfeier in Möhra am 18. Februar 1946’, p. 3.

Youth Sunday (12 May) in 1946, the local church had not seen so many visitors for a long time.⁵⁵

The religious enthusiasm of refugees in various places was enduring. The Sudeten Germans at Weida, for example, were noted for their zeal in attending church services. The parish distributed communion to 2,135 people in May 1947 as compared to 400 people previously (and no variation in population). The Sudeten Germans were regarded as the backbone of the Weida community.⁵⁶ In general, an author in *Glaube und Heimat* observed that the religious involvement of the refugees throughout Thuringia was 'vibrant' and 'comforting'.⁵⁷ Another reported that over two-thirds of the readership of *Glaube und Heimat* were refugees who were especially active in church life.⁵⁸

In addition, individuals who had left the churches in previous years returned and others who were never members entered.⁵⁹ One priest commented that there were many people who had, after years of apostasy, returned to the confessional stool.⁶⁰ Even some internees in the concentration camp at Buchenwald managed to find God despite the difficulties of life. According to one prisoner, Wolfgang Eichler: 'We recognise that the meaning of human life lies not in the attainment of earthly goals but rather in the discovery of the path to God.'⁶¹ Eichler noted that, on his incarceration in 1945/1946, only a few of his fellow inmates were Christians, but in the course of the years 'a very

⁵⁵ *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p. 3; attendance at events in Sondershausen: *GuH*, 1/9, 23/6/46, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p. 3; at Weimar: *GuH*, 1/11, 7/7/46, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p. 3; at Altenburg: *GuH*, 1/15, 4/8/46, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', p. 3.

⁵⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Weida to the BGVP, 20/6/47; on Sudetenlanders see: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über meine Seelsorgstätigkeit in Leutenberg im Jahre 1946', 2/1/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Niedersachswerfen to the BGVP, 4/8/47.

⁵⁷ *GuH*, 2/6, 9/2/47, 'Haben Flüchtlinge in den Gemeinden eine Aufgabe', Pf. Müller, p. 3; *GuH*, 3/15, 11/4/48, 'Woran erkennen wir die lebendige Gemeinde?', p. 2.

⁵⁸ *GuH*, 2/40, 5/10/47, 'Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?', Schröter (Altenburg), p. 2.

⁵⁹ In general see: E. Stegmann, p. 110.

⁶⁰ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Rudolf Kirchner (Friedrichslohra), am Feste der Hl. Familie 1947'; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Kirchgandern to the BGVP, 13/4/48; *BFA*, T3: Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, Bremen, 28/12/45.

⁶¹ W. Eichler, p. 19.

great number' converted.⁶² Another internee observed a religious revival at Buchenwald and remarked that the converted included staunch former Nazis who adopted Christianity for the solace and hope it offered.⁶³ In early 1947, a POW returned to Leutenberg from captivity in Russia and, together with his impoverished mother, turned to God. In response to church requests for help, 40 homeless people gifted them a small pile of belongings.⁶⁴ There are other reports of former soldiers that became Christians.⁶⁵

The consolation offered by the churches ensured that, in some places, the popularity of the churches continued. As is evident with former Nazis at Buchenwald or destitute ex-soldiers, it seems that the depths of human exhaustion after the war allowed the churches to intercede with the message of the hope of the Christian gospel and invite a commitment. At one home returnees' camp, for instance, such was the religious fervour of the men that they were likened to drowning people clinging to a board as their only hope of survival.⁶⁶ This was true also for many refugees. The refugees were the most affected by the situation of need in post-war Thuringia and they required support most. Such was the desire for spiritual comfort that there was interest simply in partaking in 'something religious' whether it was Catholic or Protestant.⁶⁷ It did not matter. At Linderbach, a large number of Protestants attended Catholic services with their children.⁶⁸ Any solace, it seemed, was better than none at all.

⁶² Ibid., p. 36.

⁶³ B. Ritscher (ed.), p. 93.

⁶⁴ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Frühjahrsbericht 1947' (Leutenberg), 14/6/47.

⁶⁵ GuH, 3/34, 22/8/48, 'Evangelische Männergemeinde fordert!', H. Wunder, p. 3; GuH, 3/45, 7/11/48, 'Männer suchen die Kirche', Pf. Stosch, p. 1; but, still, a minority: BEA, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten', undated.

⁶⁶ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 129, 'Bericht: Ex-priesters Mutke, über seine Tätigkeit in den Flüchtlings- und Heimkehrerlagern', 8/11/47.

⁶⁷ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties', undated.

⁶⁸ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 129, H. Muschalek (priest, Erfurt) to the BGVF, 18/10/1947.

Stagnation in places

Despite the evidence that suggests that there was continuing religious enthusiasm in various areas of Thuringia after the immediate post-war period, much evidence indicates that this was not the case in other regions. The dwindling popularity of the churches in these locales is revealed predominantly in people's involvement in the church service, which was central to religious life in Thuringia. Both churches emphasised its importance. For example, reports submitted by parishes and Pastoral Care Stations were required to supply the visitation numbers of resident Catholics to services, which were described as *compulsory*.⁶⁹ All professing Catholics were to attend church services and receive mass.

Despite the importance of the church service, there were many areas where participation was poor. The Catholic yearbook reported that throughout the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese, on average only 38.4 percent of all Catholics visited church services in 1948.⁷⁰ This may be compared to 57.2 percent in the Fulda diocese in 1942.⁷¹ Holy Masses celebrated at Sollstedt and Treba attracted only about 30 percent of local Catholics. Low attendance was compounded on workdays where participation was never greater than 10 percent (although services were compulsory only on Sundays).⁷² The priest complained of poor attendance throughout the towns in the Neudietendorf district where services in Neudietendorf itself attracted between 15 to 20 percent of local Catholics while services in outlying villages only 10 to 15 percent.⁷³ At Arnstadt, attendance numbered approximately 1,200 of the 4,000 strong Catholic community.⁷⁴ In the area around Arnstadt, while 80 to 90 percent of Silesians went to church, only 15 to

⁶⁹ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Stepfershausen, Meiningen, 1/2/47.

⁷⁰ KH, 1944-51, p. 329.

⁷¹ KH, 1944-51, p. 397.

⁷² BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bleicherode to the BGVE, 30/6/47.

⁷³ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Jahresbericht der Seelsorgstelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946'; also at Waltersleben (Erfurt) 10% -20%: BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Waltersleben, Erfurt, 1/2/47.

⁷⁴ BEA, BGVE-BAE-M, 129, 'Jahresbericht 1946 für die Pfarrgemeinde Arnstadt (Stadt)', 2/2/1947.

20 percent of Sudeten Germans attended.⁷⁵ In the Meiningen deaconate in Southern Thuringia, Helmershausen reported 40 percent participation in church services.⁷⁶ At Linderbach, only one-third of all Catholics regularly attended church service and in winter one-fifth, while at Alach/Ringleben participation wavered according to weather conditions from 40 to 70 percent.⁷⁷ The implication is that people visited services when it suited them and not, as the church authorities attempted to dictate, on a consistent weekly basis. For instance, one priest complained about a family in his district which called themselves ‘good Catholics’ but nevertheless often failed to go to church or fulfil their Easter duties.⁷⁸

Participation was low elsewhere also. In the Leutenberg area, only 10 percent of the population visited either church, Catholic or Protestant. The priest noted a ‘heathen spirit’ and a widespread pursuit of pleasure which made the life of local Catholics difficult.⁷⁹ The priest at Bilzingsleben observed:

The native population has completely died off to Christianity. The best evidence to this is dilapidated, dirty churches where there is hardly an intact window pane to be seen ... Sunday is the most suitable day for disposing of dung.⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly, church attendance was low. In addition, the priest at Niedersachswerfen reported that the majority of the 1,970 Catholics in his jurisdiction lacked any enthusiasm for religion and were in great danger of becoming apathetic.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 129, ‘Jahresbericht 1946 für die Arnstadt (Land)’, 2/2/1947; *BEA*, 306, ‘Jahresbericht für Bad Salza (1947)’.

⁷⁶ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Helmershausen, 31/1/47.

⁷⁷ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorglich-caritativen Verhältnisse in Seelsorgsbezirk Erfurt-Ost (Linderbach)’, undated (probably early 1947); see also: *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, Zentralregistratur, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage der Pfarrkuratie Stadtilm’, 28/1/47; 40%-60% at Stepfershausen: *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, 1/2/47.

⁷⁸ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bad Salza to the BGVF, 8/12/46.

⁷⁹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Frühjahrsbericht 1947’, Leutenberg, 14/6/47.

⁸⁰ *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

⁸¹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Niedersachswerfen to the BGVF, 4/8/47.

While figures for church attendance are not as readily available for the Protestant Church as for the Catholic Church, there is no doubt that it too suffered from believers who stayed away from services. Although Mitzenheim remarked that ‘the heart of the community life is the church service’, many people were indifferent to attending church.⁸² One author in *Glaube und Heimat* pointed out that faith was developed only within church walls, despite the popular and widespread view that ‘I have my faith regardless of whether I go to church or not’.⁸³ There was also a section of the population that was condemned by the church authorities for its decision not to attend services but to read *Glaube und Heimat* instead.⁸⁴ In addition, the area around Friedrichslohra was described as an ‘evangelical wasteland’ in which 98 percent of evangelical Christians had abandoned the Church in favour of nihilism and godlessness.⁸⁵ Many opted not to go to services but rather to develop their own form of religion that worked for them. This ‘Private Christianity’ became a ‘hobby’.⁸⁶ By 1948, there was a ‘shockingly great’ lack of interest in religious affairs and the church service in particular.⁸⁷ It is readily apparent that *Glaube und Heimat* assumed a very defensive tone, especially in 1947 and 1948, toward the population at large which was reported as largely indifferent and hostile to Christianity.

Observations maintained that it was mostly youth and men who remained aloof from the churches. Youth attendance at Protestant services throughout Thuringia was minimal and one adolescent in particular noted that, while in general only very few people went to church, he ‘scarcely knew’ one young man that attended.⁸⁸ Another youth proclaimed the

⁸² *GuH*, 3/5, 1/2/48, ‘Aufgaben und Pläne für 1948’, Mitzenheim, p. 1; *GuH*, 3/21-22, 30/5/48, ‘Kann man Christ sein ohne Kirche?’, Mitzenheim, pp. 1-2.

⁸³ *GuH*, 2/7, 16/2/47, ‘Glaube und Gottesdienst’, Dr. Deter (Gera-Untermhaus), p. 1.

⁸⁴ *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, ‘Ich lese “Glaube und Heimat”, das genügt mir’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Rudolf Kirchner (Friedrichslohra), am Feste der Hl. Familie 1947’.

⁸⁶ *GuH*, 3/28, 11/7/48, ‘Privatchristentum?’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 1; see also: *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, ‘Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?’, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *GuH*, 3/12, 21/3/48, ‘Unsere Aussprache über Mitarbeit’, F. Zimmer (Bad Blankenburg), p. 3.

⁸⁸ *GuH*, 3/2, 11/1/48, ‘Die Situation der Jugend und die Kirche’, Pf. Neumann, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/8, 22/2/48, ‘Wie die Jugend über die Kirche denkt’, p. 4.

terminal sickness of the Christian Church as a whole.⁸⁹ The TeK was fully aware of the situation and, as a result, in 1948 attempted to call the entire Thuringian Christian community to serve the purpose of attracting the youth people to church.⁹⁰ Men also avoided religion. One author in *Glaube und Heimat* reported that returning POWs kept their distance in such numbers that those who did attend church were a minority.⁹¹ The Catholic authorities issued special guidelines for the purpose of caring for the returnees, very few of whom, it asserted, came back as ‘intact Catholics’.⁹² In all, ‘By far the greatest section of church-goers today consists of older people, of whom [there are] more women than men.’⁹³

Both the Catholic and Protestant churches valued attendance at services and yet still suffered low attendances in many places. As one church official perceived, because there was no compulsion to attend church, most Christians simply did not.⁹⁴ The result of non-attendance and indifference toward Christianity was that the Church was ‘tottering’.⁹⁵

A decline?

The contradictory nature of the evidence indicates that in some places in Thuringia religious life enjoyed continuing popularity, while in other areas churches were not well attended. It is possible that many priests and church officials chose to emphasise the good and popular aspects of church life over the negative. This was highly likely especially with the evangelical weekly newspaper, *Glaube und Heimat*, and, in particular, its regular column on what events and holidays churches were celebrating and organising

⁸⁹ *GuH*, 3/8, 22/2/48, ‘Wie die Jugend über die Kirche denkt’, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *GuH*, 3/2, 11/1/48, ‘Die Situation der Jugend und die Kirche’, Pf. Neumann, p. 2.

⁹¹ *GuH*, 2/3, 26/1/47, ‘Hetzpredigten?’, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/7, 15/2/48, ‘Was nun? Die Frage eines Heimkehrers an die Gemeinden’, p. 3.

⁹² *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, ‘Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten’, undated.

⁹³ *GuH*, 3/40, 3/10/48, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Die fordernde ev. Männergemeinde’, Denzin (Gera), p. 3.

⁹⁴ *GuH*, 3/33, 15/8/48, ‘Muß man sonntags in die Kirche gehen?’, K. Brinkel, p. 3.

⁹⁵ *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, ‘Warum wollt ihr sterben?’, Pf. Wolf (Altenburg), p. 2.

throughout Thuringia. This “noticeboard” reported largely on special religious ceremonies, which were also hardly representative of weekly church life.

In any case, the polarity of people’s responses to the churches is particularly evident in regard to the situation of refugees. On one hand, in some areas Sudeten Germans were noted as zealous and committed Christians who attended church services regularly. A report on pastoral care in northern Erfurt in 1946 observed the higher participation of refugees in comparison to local Catholics.⁹⁶ In other places, however, refugees were embittered toward the Church and forsook it as a result of having to endure alien traditions in the course of services.⁹⁷ The most compelling reason for this ostensible contradiction is variations in local conditions and personnel. For example, the priest at Ruhla successfully overcame cultural and linguistic differences to mould a community that was united in celebrating church services.⁹⁸ On the other hand, the predominantly refugee Catholic community at Weihe largely disintegrated with a seemingly indifferent clergyman.⁹⁹ At Bilzingsleben, also, the population at large ‘died off to Christianity’ presumably as a consequence of months without a priest, and, by the time a priest arrived, it was too late.¹⁰⁰ Despite this pattern, even with an enthusiastic priest, the Leutenberg population was largely apathetic to religion.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, the available evidence cannot sustain a systematic analysis of the variations between localities. It seems that people and communities simply responded disparately to stimuli in different environments.

⁹⁶ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht’, North Erfurt, undated (probably early 1947).

⁹⁷ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Kirchgandern to the BGVF, 13/4/48; P. Bucher (ed.), p. 367; on ‘alien traditions’ see: *KH*, 1944-51, p. 213; *GuH*, 3/14, 4/4/48, ‘Ein Wort an die Ostpreußen in der TeK’, E. Fügner (Eisenach), p. 4.

⁹⁸ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Walter Kehr (Ruhla) to the BGVF, 13/8/46.

⁹⁹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Johann Steinbach (Chairman of the Thuringian CDU) to the BGVF, 10/9/1946.

¹⁰⁰ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Bilzingsleben (Leo Szelma) to Bishop Johannes Dietz (Fulda), 5/6/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht’, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47; *BFA*, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

¹⁰¹ *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Leutenberg, 2/2/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht über meine [Johannes Tschoepe] Seelsorgstätigkeit in Leutenberg im Jahre 1946’, 2/1/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Frühjahrsbericht 1947’, Leutenberg, 14/6/47.

In all, the more contradictory picture of the popularity of the churches in 1948 than in 1945 points in some measure to a decline in religious interest. This is further reflected in the numbers of people who entered and left the TeK from 1946 to 1949. From year to year, church leavers increased while entrances decreased (see Figure II below). The total membership of the TeK also dropped from 1946 to 1948. These trends are consistent with church figures in the western zones. Entrances were 47,000 and 75,000 in 1945 and 1946, yet, by 1949, 43,000 entered while 86,000 left.¹⁰² The number that left the Evangelical Church in Germany from 1946 also increased yearly.¹⁰³

Figure II: *TeK membership statistics, 1946-1949*¹⁰⁴

	Total Membership of the TeK	Exits from the TeK	Entrants into the TeK
1946	1,696,601	1,652	5,206
1947		2,076	4,435
1948	1,678,260	3,366	4,107
1949		7,635	2,873

The figures for the Catholic Church are more problematic. Membership in the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese dropped from 397,400 in 1946 to 344,000 in 1950, but population movements obscured trends. Still, a drop in numbers to the order of over one in eight Catholics from 1946 to 1950 does indicate a decline in church popularity to some degree. Even so, it is also unknown how much of this slump occurred before 1949. In the Fulda diocese, 282 exits in 1947 (numbers are sketchy in 1945 and 1946), increased to 538 and 953 in 1948 and 1949 respectively.¹⁰⁵ As for the Catholic Church in Germany, the total number who left the Church dropped to 9,204 in 1945 before increasing dramatically thereafter to 19,988 in 1948 and 30,806 in 1949. On the other hand, the number that entered the Church increased significantly in 1945 before rising only slightly

¹⁰² C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 164; *KJ*, 1945-1948, p. 460ff.

¹⁰³ See *KJ*, 1950, pp. 363-385, esp. p. 382.

¹⁰⁴ H. Dähn, 'Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften', p. 843.

¹⁰⁵ *KH*, 1944-51, pp. 404-413.

in 1946 and 1947. The number of Catholics who returned to the Church likewise increased in 1945 before dropping sharply in 1946 and 1947.¹⁰⁶

Banal statistics do not always tell the full story. General eyewitness statements also attested to a decline in the popularity of the TeK and the Catholic Church. One author in *Glaube und Heimat* observed that there was ‘very sparse religious participation’ in Thuringia at the end of 1947. He stated that the people who remained faithful – who read *Glaube und Heimat*, attended church and took part in community life – were largely eastern evacuees and most native Thuringians had abandoned church life.¹⁰⁷ Two further statements are telling. One pastor remarked in August 1947: ‘Shortly after the collapse a religious wave flooded over Germany. This wave has ebbed away.’¹⁰⁸ At the end of 1948, there was a similar observation from the editorial staff at *Glaube und Heimat*: ‘We had expected a rise in religion after the war. But, after a brief rise, most ebbed away.’¹⁰⁹ There was moreover an expectation that the large numbers of people who left the Evangelical Church during the Nazi era would return and a corresponding concern that the Church would not be able to cope with the overload. However, while there was a significant increase in returns to the Church in 1945 and 1946, they tailed off and the church expectations were unfounded.¹¹⁰ The same occurred for the Catholic Church throughout Germany: expectations in 1945 were dashed by 1949. The bishop of Cologne lamented the failure of people to listen to the Church and change their lives and, in early 1947, the Pope even spoke of perhaps the greatest crisis in Christianity since antiquity. The West German bishops met five years after the war’s end and issued a circular that acknowledged that there had not been a popular return to God.¹¹¹ The more ambiguous picture of the later sources, in comparison to evidence from 1945, the statistical figures

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 416-417.

¹⁰⁷ *GuH*, 2/40, 5/10/47, ‘Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?’, Schröter (Altenburg), p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, ‘Überzeugendes Zeugnis’, F. Högner, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, ‘Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?’, p. 2; see also: T. A. Seidel, ‘Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche...’, pp. 90ff.

¹¹⁰ *KJ*, 1950, p. 382; approx. figures: 12,500 (1944), 47,000 (1945), 75,000 (1946), 58,000 (1947), 53,000 (1948), 43,000 (1949).

¹¹¹ K. Repgen, p. 141.

and general negative statements reveal that there was indeed a trend away from the churches after an initial spike in 1945. There is no doubt, however, that many believers still attended church enthusiastically in 1948 throughout areas of Thuringia, though it seems not in the same numbers as in 1945.

Three further issues must be dealt with that challenge *a priori* the contention that there was some form of decline in the popularity of the churches after 1945. First, it is possible that the percentages of attendance at services are a little misleading if it is considered that they reflected weekly attendance (or with whatever regularity services were held). It is therefore conceivable that, for example, in an area with a weekly participation of 50 percent, the entire Catholic community attended a church service over a two week period. This proposition, nevertheless, does not exonerate Catholics for whom weekly attendance was compulsory nor does it adequately account for low attendances given the primary role of consolation for involvement in religious life. Church figures and general statements also indicate that the decline was much more severe than the fortnightly attendance of every registered believer.

It could also be ventured that the religious revival in 1945 was an anomaly and that the popularity of the churches returned to 'normal' in the years thereafter. No special factors for a decline would then be required. Still, this contention creates another problem – what or when was 'normal' church observance? For instance, the war years (1939 to 1945) posed special problems and pressures for faith communities, the period 1934 to 1939 were years of significant persecution for the Catholic Church and the most vitriolic period of the evangelical Church struggle, while the Weimar republic era was tainted by an often disastrous economic situation and, in the early years especially, by the effects of the First World War. There was no 'normal' situation or time of 'normal' interest in the churches. Participation in the churches in 1945 was definitely an anomaly, *but only because of the subsequent decline*. The comparable situation after the First World War confirmed the special nature of events in 1945. Exits from the Catholic Church grew tenfold in the first three years after 1918 without any increase in religious participation. Reasons for the popularity of the churches in 1945 and the decline thereafter are, as a

result, required to show what was different. The last issue concerns the localities where there was no great spike in religious interest in 1945. This has been mentioned above and it was the case, for example, in some rural areas where hundreds of years of ‘slackness’ in religious observance was cemented.¹¹² At no time or in no environment were these people motivated to get involved in church life. In such places, of course, there can be no discussion of a decline in the popularity of the churches from 1945 to 1948 as there was no increase in the first place. Yet, on the basis of the evidence, which largely shows a revival in 1945, this was the exception rather than the rule.

Analysis

There are three major explanations for the drop in church popularity after 1945. The most compelling reason is the unique situation that the end of the war represented and the subsequent enduring situation of need that discouraged faith. At the end of the war in 1945 there was a hope that the difficult wartime and immediate post-war conditions would soon be alleviated. This did not happen and arduous living conditions in Thuringia continued until beyond 1948. In the exceptional situation of the immediate post-war months, religious enthusiasm was high due to the consolation and hope the churches offered. However, it is perhaps no surprise that given the non-fulfilment of these expectations many left the churches or became inactive in the ensuing years. One author perceptively commented: ‘[Man] approached God with illusory expectations. [Man] wanted to force a miracle. The miracle did not come.’¹¹³

People expected the churches to fill their material and spiritual needs, yet the churches were not always able to do what was required of them.¹¹⁴ Despite the best efforts of the Catholic and evangelical churches to provide spiritual and material support, many people remained without aid. Both churches were not able to provide adequate material

¹¹² *GuH*, 3/15, 11/4/48, ‘Woran erkennen wir die lebendige Gemeinde?’, p. 2.

¹¹³ *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, ‘Überzeugendes Zeugnis’, F. Högner, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ C. Vollnhals, ‘Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung’, pp. 151-155, 165-167.

provisions or spiritual guidance to believers in the post-war period (see chapter three above). The inflated population also made it impossible in many places to hold Catholic services which all believers were able to attend. Services often could only be held in a centrally placed chapel that was not always accessible and often too small.¹¹⁵ The helplessness of the church authorities to counter and solve other issues such as rape and unwanted pregnancies also added to their difficulties in providing for the population at large.¹¹⁶ Mitzenheim reflected at the end of 1948 that the prevailing conditions which could not be remedied by the churches played a key role in explaining people's cold indifference: 'The wind blows bitterly cold through the world. Questions remain without answers. Need, loneliness, abandonment, envy [and] cries for revenge allow hearts to freeze.'¹¹⁷ All reports agree that the framework and provisions of the churches sagged under the burden of the tremendous religious and material need.

In effect, when people did not receive the consolation or aid that they required, they neglected the Church. Johannes Tschoepe, who oversaw the Leutenberg parish, observed that the religious enthusiasm of the Silesian refugees waned over the course of 1946 due to exhaustion with the continuing meagre conditions and a longing for home. When conditions in Leutenberg improved somewhat in 1947, there was, however, greater enthusiasm in religious life.¹¹⁸ The popularity of the Protestant Church in the district of Ilmenau also was different week by week according to when people's needs were met.¹¹⁹ In many cases, when the local church was unable to provide for the needs of the individual, he left. This principle is reflected in one article in *Glaube und Heimat* entitled 'Private Christianity'. In fact: 'One is astonished how many people assert that they are Christians...even those who have left the Church.' This form of 'private Christianity' was self-centred and focussed only on what the Church could provide for the

¹¹⁵ Cf. for a similar situation in the Meißen diocese see: B. Mitzscherlich, pp. 562.

¹¹⁶ C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', pp. 153-155.

¹¹⁷ *LKAE* A 158, B. VIII, 'Unsere Jahreslösung 1947', Mitzenheim.

¹¹⁸ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht über meine [Johannes Tschoepe] Seelsorgstätigkeit in Leutenberg im Jahre 1946', 2/1/47; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Seelsorgsbericht Leutenberg 1947', February 1948.

¹¹⁹ *GuH*, 2/28, 13/7/47, 'Thüringer kirchliche Chronik', Sup. Ilmenau, p. 3.

individual.¹²⁰ One part of this was a general attitude to leave the church and neglect services in order to avoid paying tithes.¹²¹ Many people attended services when needs were met and, because it was often difficult to meet needs in Thuringia, religious interest waned in many places.

The enduring need and the inability of the churches to help therefore left many despondent and this state often led to resignation, apathy, indifference and nihilism, particularly amongst the youth and men.¹²² There was a longing for death as a hope for better times disappeared. Suicide was, as a result, frequent.¹²³ According to one popular statement: 'I have only one wish: I want to fall asleep tonight and not wake up tomorrow morning.'¹²⁴ God himself was held responsible for the enduring deprivation of the post-war years.¹²⁵ One man on his deathbed quoted Gerhard Hauptmann: 'Had God loved us too little?'¹²⁶ One manifestation of the post-war apathy was the pursuit of pleasure, which was widespread throughout Germany, especially amongst youth.¹²⁷ Hedonism counteracted church morals and the Protestant Yearbook in 1950 stated that all regions in Germany after 1945 struggled with a considerable rise in 'crimes and offences against

¹²⁰ *GuH*, 3/28, 11/7/48, 'Privatchristentum?', Pf. Waldmann, p. 1; *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, 'Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?', p. 2.

¹²¹ *KJ*, 1950, p. 383.

¹²² *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten', undated; *BEA*, BGVE-BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Gotha-Siebleben, 28/1/47; *GuH*, 3/2, 11/1/48, 'Die Situation der Jugend und die Kirche', Pf. Neumann, pp. 1-2; *GuH*, 3/28, 11/7/48, 'Müssen wir Männer stumm sein?' Dr. W. Schäfer, p. 1; *GuH*, 8/9/46, 1/20, 'Ewigkeit in die Zeit: "Was kann uns helfen"', p. 1; *GuH*, 2/9, 2/3/47, 'Gnade in gnadenlose Zeit', K. Linder (Altenburg), p. 1; *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, 'Ewigkeit in die Zeit – Lätare', Lic. Geinrich, p. 1; *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, 'Die Stunde der Barmherzigkeit', Dr. Hans Lilge, p.4; *GuH*, 2/45, 9/11/47, 'Optimismus oder Pessimismus', Prof. Dr. Kayser-Petersen (Jena), p. 1; *GuH*, 2/46, 16/11/47, 'Überwindung der Verzweiflung', E. Böhmer, p. 2; *GuH*, 2/27, 6/7/47, 'Resignation oder Glaube', F. Högner, p. 4; P. Bucher (ed.), p. 367; M. Greschat, 'Vorgeschichte', p. 13.

¹²³ Similarly in Bremen: Hartmut Müller, "'Es war der 25. April, als für mich eine Welt zusammenbrach"...', pp. 87-88.

¹²⁴ *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, 'Warum wollt ihr sterben?', Pf. Wolf (Altenburg), p. 2; *GuH*, 3/7, 15/2/48, 'Das Selbstmordproblem für Arzt und Seelsorge', W. Schulte, p. 3; on the loss of hope see: *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, 'Weg aus dem Chaos', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Griez), p. 4; H. Nitsche, p. 17.

¹²⁵ *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, 'Ewigkeit in die Zeit – Lätare', Lic. Geinrich, p. 1.

¹²⁶ *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, 'Überzeugendes Zeugnis', F. Högner, p. 1.

¹²⁷ For instance: C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 151ff.

morality'.¹²⁸ One Catholic report noted that the two major themes of conversation amongst men were eating and drinking and women.¹²⁹ The population was dissuaded from a lasting religious zeal by the situation of need that obscured hope and, in its stead, offered despondency. It seems that the acute need brought people to faith in 1945, but chronic deprivation distracted them from religion thereafter.

There is always an exception to the rule. As shown above, some people who experienced severe need turned to the churches for consolation. These people included prisoners at Buchenwald, war returnees and refugees throughout the period from 1945 to 1948. Although the majority of returning POWs rejected the churches and the Christian message outright, some did enter the churches. The contradiction can only be explained by the fact that the need, it seems, polarised people. Nonetheless, in general, more people turned from the churches than turned to the churches.

The growing environment of secularism is another explanation for the decline in religious popularity between 1945 and 1948. In fact, the enduring need and the failure of the churches to provide adequately for their believers opened the door for increasing secularism. A Catholic circular regarding the pastoral care of returning POWs blamed 'collectivisation' (in the sense of mass politics) for the corruption of many men, not only in the historic form of collective indoctrination perpetrated by Nazism but also by increasing socialism. Such was the alarming trend that it perceptively warned that 'collectivisation' under the influence of socialism would be more inhibiting for posterity than Nazism was in the past.¹³⁰ Articles published in *Glaube und Heimat* often referred to an anti-religious, secular spirit throughout Thuringia without any further elaboration. That *Glaube und Heimat* was subjected to censorship may indicate why the authors referred to an anti-religious spirit rather than overtly critiquing the influence of socialism

¹²⁸ *KJ*, 1945-1948, p. 481

¹²⁹ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten', undated; *GuH*, 2/15, 13/4/47, 'Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Bleibe deiner Kirche treu!', H. Lorenz (Tabarz), p. 4.

¹³⁰ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten', undated.

and the SED. According to one article, there was an anonymous number of people who maintained that religion was inherently characterised by ‘passivity, quietism, timidity from haggling, [and] flight from responsibility...’.¹³¹ Another author referred to the ‘guiding spirits of the age’ which were antagonistic to Christianity.¹³² This statement must surely relate to the influence of socialism. The author continued that whilst many still lived out their faith, the strong tradition of the Reformation Church was being eroded from the inside. There were, for instance, religious socialists within the TeK who propagated a crude synthesis of socialism and Christianity in an attempt to co-opt the churches with the socialist ideas of the SED.

Although the SED and the religious socialists failed in creating a viable *Religionspolitik* throughout the SBZ, the increasing influence and consolidation of the SED by 1947 and 1948 introduced a more prevalent political secularism than was the case in 1945.¹³³ The figures of those that left the TeK reflect this progression. TeK leavers increased exponentially from 1946. 424 more people left the Church in 1947 than in 1946 (2,076 - 1,652), this figure more than doubled to 1,290 in 1948 (3,366 - 2,076) and, in 1949, tripled to 4,269 (7,635 - 3,366). Whilst no data exists for where exactly these people went or what they did – surely they did not all run to socialism – the large increase in church exits in 1948 and 1949 corresponded to the period of the increasing Stalinisation of the SED.¹³⁴ The number of exits in 1949 especially reflected the growing influence of the SED up to and after the foundation of the GDR in October 1949. The figures for 1949 cannot be considered in isolation from the number that left the TeK in 1948, which in itself was a significant increase on previous years and set the trend for those that left in 1949. The same was true for the Catholic Church and exits in the Fulda diocese increased year by year. One priest, Heinz Siebert, believed that the pressures exerted by the SED

¹³¹ *GuH*, 2/35, 31/8/47, ‘Flucht in die Religion’, p. 2; see also: *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, ‘Nichts besonderes’, p. 3.

¹³² *GuH*, 1/18, 25/8/46, ‘Der Auszug des modernen Menschen aus dem Vaterhaus’, Sup. Bauer (Stadtroda), p.1; *GuH*, 1/25, 13/10/46, ‘Der moderne Mensch im tiefsten Abgrund’, Sup. Bauer (Stadtroda), p. 1; H. Nitsche, pp. 18-19

¹³³ G. Besier, ‘Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang’, p. 145.

¹³⁴ J. Foitzik, p. 55ff.

on people to leave the Catholic Church in Eichsfeld during the period of the GDR dictatorship began with a conflict over tithes in 1948.¹³⁵

The increasing influence of socialism and the SED in public life, however, should not be overstated. Gareth Pritchard and Mark Allinson have established that there was much anti-KPD/SED and anti-Soviet feeling amongst Thuringians who blamed them both for the harsh situation.¹³⁶ The SED were moreover dismissed as ‘Russian lackeys’.¹³⁷ The increasing Stalinisation of the SED in 1947 and 1948 did not entail a forced co-ordination of the churches, and the churches continued to carry out their duties and services in the community. Increasing political secularism was, to some degree, a factor in a turning from the churches after 1945, but it cannot be considered primary. Instead, secularism offered a viable alternative which was promoted by the enduring need and the inability of the churches to provide sufficiently for their communities.

Conclusion

The almost unmitigated freedom of religion offered to the churches in the immediate post-war era by the American and early Soviet occupations was unprecedented and allowed a religious revival. Confident that the churches could provide support, consolation and hope, people looked to religion and there was a general rise in church popularity in 1945. In some places, the local churches were able to sustain this revival throughout the following years. On the other hand, many churches were not and religious life stalled. There were two diametrically opposed animating principles: a religious *mentalité* disposed toward the churches and a spirit of political and/or material secularism.¹³⁸ Despite evidence in different places pointing both ways, it is apparent that there was some decline in the churches’ popularity after the initial spike in 1945.

¹³⁵ H. Siebert, pp. 218-219.

¹³⁶ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 46-52; G. Pritchard, pp. 156-158; see also: *KJ*, 1950, pp. 383-385

¹³⁷ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, p. 48.

¹³⁸ See, in general: *GuH*, 2/34, 24/8/47, ‘Ewigkeit in die Zeit – Aufgetane Herzen’, Landgraf, p. 1.

Since the churches could not compel their own believers to attend services regularly, their influence in reality was significantly limited and the hoped-for 're-Christianisation' of the Thuringian and German population at large was superficial and an illusion.¹³⁹

Throughout the evangelical church in Germany, the numbers that left during 1933 to 1939 totalled more than 1.3 million while in West Germany, by 1949, approximately only 75,000 had returned.¹⁴⁰ The rise in interest in the churches in 1945 and 1946 simply was not sustainable and the churches could not turn back the clock. The same was true in Thuringia: exit numbers increased with greater distance from 1945 whilst entrances decreased such that, in all, only 6,504 people re-entered the TeK over the course of 1945 to 1949 while in 1933 alone over 17,000 left.¹⁴¹ In the Catholic Church also, exits increased from 1945 while entrances dropped.¹⁴² There was therefore no 're-Christianisation' of the Thuringian population.

There were three reasons why. The singular nature of the situation in 1945 immediately promoted a revival in the churches, and, when it was realised that the need was enduring, a decline in religious interest. The other side to the same coin was that the churches were unable to alleviate the need or provide telling spiritual support when it was most needed. This was largely because of the inadequacies of church resources in comparison to the size of the population and the extent of their deprivations. The steeples in 1945 were, after all, as an American observer noted, 'only a symbol, not a guarantee, for the future'.¹⁴³ This insufficiency paved the way for increasing secularism to enter the churches and erode their authority. Ultimately, the membership figures of the churches in the post-war era in Thuringia (in excess of ninety percent) are slightly misleading. That many left the churches and failed to attend services confirms that the membership figures reflected only the theoretical influence of the churches. In fact, rather than winning over

¹³⁹ C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 164.

¹⁴⁰ *KJ*, 1945-1948, pp. 460-465, here: p. 464; *KJ*, 1950, pp. 363-385; C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', p. 164.

¹⁴¹ *KJ*, 1945-1948, p. 461.

¹⁴² *KH*, 1944-51, p. 385ff.

¹⁴³ Clemens Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 80.

the people through a 're-Christianisation', the population largely fell into an ideological apathy that ignored both the churches and, as Allinson has shown, the SED.

Although outside the chronological parameters for this study, church popularity and membership plummeted significantly after the establishment of the GDR in October 1949. While 80.5 percent of the GDR population belonged to the Protestant Church and 11 percent to the Catholic Church in 1949, by 1964, these figures dropped to 60 and 8 percent respectively. By 1989, fewer than 25 percent of the population were Protestant and 4 to 5 percent were Catholic.¹⁴⁴ For this significant drop there are two major explanations: the oppressive *Religionspolitik* of the SED dictatorship, which initiated conflict between Church and State, and a world-wide process of secularisation, which was attendant to the onset of modernity.¹⁴⁵ It is perhaps not too far-fetched to see part of the origins for the drop in church membership after 1949 as conditioned by the pre-1949 situation. The inability of the churches to meet the needs of the community after 1945 in hand with increasing secularism cleared the path for the dramatic drop in church membership after 1949. Had the churches been able to maintain the vibrant religious life it enjoyed in 1945 and meet the needs of the people in the ensuing years, it is possible that the churches could have held more commerce with the population and, as a result, with the GDR government from 1949.

¹⁴⁴ D. Pollack, p. 271.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 271-273; H. Dähn, *Konfrontation oder Kooperation?...*, pp. 86, 200; on the impact of GDR policy see: K.-F. Daiber, p. 80; E. Neubert, 'Von der Volkskirche zur Minderheitskirche: Bilanz 1990', pp. 39-40; W. Büscher, pp. 423; on the role of secularisation see: Albrecht Schönherr, 'Gesellschaft im Wandel und Kirche in Lernprozeß', in: *Abenteuer der Nachfolge: Reden und Aufsätze 1978-1988*, ed. A. Schönherr, (West Berlin: 1988), p. 48.

5: The social influence of the churches: native Thuringians and refugees

The refugees who flooded into Germany from 1944 posed the greatest social problem for the occupation authorities, local governments and the churches.¹ The influx created a number of problems including providing adequate material and spiritual care for the refugees and their integration into society. As shown in chapter two, while the churches, and the Catholic Church in particular, made great efforts to provide material and spiritual care for the vast numbers of displaced persons, they were ultimately unsuccessful in helping everyone. The topic of this chapter is the other task that was set before the churches: the integration of the refugees into existing communities.

The influence of the churches may be measured not only by membership figures and participation in religious ceremonies but by how effective they were in manipulating the everyday behaviour of their faithful. The single most important social issue that confronted the post-war Thuringian churches was the incorporation of the refugees into existing communities and they made great efforts in order to facilitate this process. Because the churches viewed the problem of the refugees as paramount, the relationship between the refugees and native Thuringians may be used as the ‘acid test’ for evaluating the churches’ real influence on the behaviour of their parishioners. It follows that if the churches were able to persuade native Thuringians to embrace the newcomers and even support them materially when this may have been contrary to the local people’s own interests, then this is compelling evidence that the churches had a degree of genuine social influence. On the other hand, if the churches were unsuccessful in their significant attempts to compel locals to accept and to aid the evacuees in their plight, despite the

¹ H. Rudolph, pp. 21, 215ff.

importance the churches attached to the refugee question, it would indicate that there were definite limits to the churches' influence.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that, although the churches invested significant resources into attempting to co-opt native Thuringians to welcome the newcomers, the influence of the churches was not sufficient to persuade people to accept religious moral imperatives and change the way they interacted. Throughout Germany, although the churches made vigorous efforts to convince the local population to accept the newcomers, refugees were often rejected outright.² In Westphalia, for instance, the experiences of some refugees in 1945 and 1946 were such that many still suffered from painful memories into the late-1950s and beyond.³ The same was true in Thuringia. Local circumstances often meant that in some communities the 'new citizens' were embraced, yet, on the basis of the existing evidence, in a majority of places they were not accepted.

The plight of the refugees and the concern of the churches

The experiences endured by refugees expelled from former German territories after the war were often harrowing.⁴ The churches were well aware of this trauma and actively sought to comfort the evacuees and to integrate them into society through various means. Consider the reminiscences of a doctor, written for the church authorities, about the condition of refugees evicted from Breslau. This situation was quite typical:

I saw things which will always remain in my memory. Men's hands literally frozen to iron bars when they attempted to climb out of the train during a stop in order to see to their needs. But the most dreadful thing played out in a

² H. Rudolph, pp. 16, 20-22, 215ff; A. M. Birke, p. 185; M. Beer, pp. 88-103; Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956*, (Göttingen: 1998), p. 177ff; G. Bøddeker, pp. 355-356; Marita Krauss, 'Das "Wir" und das "Ihr". Ausgrenzung, Abgrenzung, Identitätsstiftung bei Einheimischen und Flüchtlingen nach 1945', in: *Vertriebene in Deutschland...*, pp. 27-39; see, for further literature on integration issues in West Germany: Uta Gerhardt, 'Bilanz der soziologischen Literatur zur Integration der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge nach 1945', in: *Vertriebene in Deutschland...*, pp. 41-58; C. Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots...*, p. 23ff.

³ H. Rudolph, pp. 217-218.

⁴ In general see: A. Eckstaedt, p. 361ff.

wagon to which I had been fetched to help in a birth. Pitch-dark. I climbed over sacks and bales and pushed an old woman. Move to the side a little I asked, but she remained unmoving. Dead. She was frozen. The young woman, for whom I was called [to help], groaned and wailed. She had significant bleeding. I determined [it was] a miscarriage. When I wanted to move the young woman into a better position, I noticed that she was frozen to the ground with her own blood.⁵

In response to such experiences, it is no surprise that most refugees desired only to return home 'at any cost'.⁶ According to the Neudietendorf report, for instance, many clung to the vague hope that they would return home.⁷ Such was the deprivation that, in most cases, the refugees were simply unable to help themselves.

As a result, the interaction between local Thuringians and the 're-settlers' was a very important issue in Thuringian social relations after the Second World War.⁸ A speech at a sitting of the Thuringian Commission for New Citizens (Landeskommission für Neubürger) stated: 'We know that the [refugee] question cannot be solved by the re-settlers themselves or by our service offices, but rather by the whole population.'⁹ A report from the evangelical pastorate at Allstedt noted that the healthy continuation of community life was dependent on overcoming existing tensions between local

⁵ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1943-1949, 'Schreckensfahrt der Ausgewiesenen, der Leidensweg von über 1600 Schlesien', undated; see also: LKAE, A 701 III, 20, 'Die Arbeit und die Entwicklung unserer Thüringer Bahnhofsmmissionen seit 1945', 6/4/1950; the treatment and eviction of some Sudeten Germans was somewhat more humane: DAW, Pers. Dok. Kümmert, Robert, '25 Jahre Pfarrer in Bad Salzungen', p. 33; F. Behr, p. 65.

⁶ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1949, 'Jahresbericht 1946 für die Arnstadt (Land)', 2/2/1947; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Leutenberg, 2/2/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Tätigkeitsbericht 1946', Aschara to the BGVF, 30/1/1947; ThHStAW, Ministerium des Innern, 649, 33, 'Jahresbericht 1946', 30/12/46; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Mitteilen Nr. 1, St. Raphaels-Verein', 2/47; BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Stepfershausen, Meiningen, 1/2/47; BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Seelsorgsbericht Leutenberg 1947', 2/1948; KH, 1944-51, p. 210; A. Eckstaedt, p. 362; M. Beer, pp. 102-103.

⁷ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, 'Jahresbericht der Seelsorgsstelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946'.

⁸ In general, see: M. Krauss, p. 27.

⁹ LKAE, A 750 IV, 166, 'Sitzung der Landeskommission für Neubürger am 20. März 1948 in Weimar'; see also: LKAE, A 593 I, *Beirat des Kirchendienstes Ost* to the LKR, 11/2/47; ThHStAW, 649, Land Thüringen, Ministerium für allgemeine Verwaltung, Amt für Neubürger, 'Jahresbericht 1946', 30/12/46.

Thuringians and the evacuees.¹⁰ This was no peripheral issue as refugees made up nearly a quarter of Thuringia's population in 1948.¹¹

The Catholic and Protestant churches, *as institutions*, certainly attempted to integrate the evacuees into existing communities. In fact, the church authorities did all they could to minimise frictions.¹² A number of events and processions were organised in order to make the refugees feel welcome. For example, Freusberg proposed that the celebration of the *Fronleichnamsprozession* at Alach in 1948 should be in the home traditions of the Catholic re-settlers at Schaderode. The Schaderode refugees comprised nearly 50 percent of the population.¹³ The Church also sought to include the new citizens in the course of regular church services. An 'hour of celebration' prepared specifically for the refugees at the Cathedral in Erfurt on 14 September 1947, for instance, featured a prayer of praise to Mary with reference to her flight with the baby Jesus to Egypt. The identification of the plight of the refugees with the experiences of Mary was intended to comfort them in the knowledge that their experiences were not unique and, in fact, endured by the mother of Jesus.¹⁴ All Catholic re-settlers, especially Silesians, were personally invited to the celebration of St. Hedwig at the Church of St. Severus in October 1946.¹⁵ Songbooks with hymns from the Sudetenland and Silesia were also in great demand as a way of accommodating the evacuees in local services and allowing them some comfort in their home traditions.¹⁶

¹⁰ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 147-148, Allstedt/Helme to the LKR, 23/5/1947.

¹¹ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 163, 'Sitzung der Landeskommission für Neubürger am 20. März 1948 in Weimar'; on the general process of the incorporation of the refugees into German society see: M. Krauss, pp. 27-39; in the *Bundesrepublik*: Uta Gerhardt, pp. 41-63.

¹² *GuH*, 3/5, 1/2/48, 'Einheimische und Evakuierte', Lange (Schmölln), p. 3; in general: W. Tischner, p. 57; H. Rudolph, pp. 217ff.

¹³ *BEA*, Stellenakten, Alach, Freusberg to the Alach *Bürgermeister*, 12/5/48.

¹⁴ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 'Liturgie', 14/9/47, also, 'Gebet für Mutter der Heimatlosen', 14/9/47.

¹⁵ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 10-13/10/1946.

¹⁶ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht', Bilzingsleben to the BGVP, 25/4/47.

The TeK also sought to promote the incorporation of the new citizens into society. A circular of the TeK, for example, urged the holding of special services to welcome the refugees and make them ‘feel at home’.¹⁷ The Protestant Church viewed the pastorate as its most effective instrument in achieving integration. In March 1948, a circular urged pastors not simply to give encouragement during services, but to provide pastoral care that showed empathy and reflected that the considerable burdens of the refugees were borne also by the pastor and the native population. This was an ‘urgent duty’.¹⁸ Similar exhortations of the TeK to the native Thuringian population to embrace the evacuees were often couched in religious terms. One author in *Glaube und Heimat* urged action by stating, in the words of the epistle of James: ‘Faith without works is dead.’¹⁹ Another article stressed that people should accept the newcomers and be doers of the Christian gospel and not merely listeners.²⁰

The widespread failure of the churches

Despite the considerable energies of the churches, local populations in Thuringia treated the refugees in different ways. Local responses to the refugees varied from warm greeting to detachment to hostility. In some localities, relations between the two communities were reported as ranging from tolerable to good. At Ruhla, the local priest acted as the mediator between the old and new citizens. One of his parishioners complained to the General Vicariate in Fulda about the clergyman’s imminent displacement to Eisenach and stated that only he had managed to overcome differences during the church services. Where there had previously been discord, there was now harmony.²¹ There were likewise no problems with singing in various dialects at Alach: ‘The believers were voluminous –

¹⁷ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 14/47, 21/6/47; *GuH*, 1/3, 12/5/46, ‘Aus der Thüringer evangelischen Kirche’, p. 3; *GuH*, 1/7, 9/6/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 4.

¹⁸ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 7/48, 2/3/48; see also: *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 8/46, 17/9/46.

¹⁹ *GuH*, 2/8, 23/2/47, ‘Nochmals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute’, p.1; cf. *GuH*, 2/29, 20/7/47, ‘Zur ersten Bibelwoche’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 2.

²⁰ *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, ‘Ich lese “Glaube und Heimat”, das genügt mir’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 2.

²¹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Walter Kehr to the BGVP, 13/8/46.

on Palm Sunday, we sang in five voices!!!'²² Celebrations at Ichtershausen also successfully encouraged integration and a common understanding.²³ At Arnstadt, the co-existence of refugees and locals was 'relatively good'.²⁴ At Leutenberg, relations were described as 'bearable'.²⁵ At Wangenheim, the interaction between the two parties was 'partly favourable, partly less than good!' A report on social conditions in Eastern Erfurt, dating probably from early 1947, noted that many sections of the local population did as much as possible to accommodate the refugees.²⁶ At Bad Salzungen in the Meiningen Commissariat, women provided much-needed clothing for refugee orphans.²⁷ However, there is some a degree of ambiguity in these documents as the local responses to the refugees ranged from positive to neutral.

In most cases, the church authorities failed to persuade local faith communities to embrace their co-religionists. In order to facilitate better care of the diaspora communities, Freusberg decreed in March 1947 that existing Catholic communities should henceforth assume supervision of recently established 'diaspora stations' in 'god-parenthood' (*Patenschaft*). These stations were established for the care of Catholics in far-flung areas. The object of the *Patenschaften* was to initiate closer relationships between the two distinct Catholic communities. According to Freusberg: 'Great value is to be placed on the awakening of interests for diaspora care and the opening of hearts for the Catholic expanse.'²⁸ Established Catholic communities in Freusberg's jurisdiction had made little or no attempt to work in collaboration with the local 'diaspora stations' erected for the care of the refugees. The measure to establish *Patenschaften* was, as stated

²² BEA, Stellenakten, Alach, 'Geschichte der Stelle', Anna Ossig, 1985.

²³ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Ziemetshausen to the BGVF, 8/9/48.

²⁴ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, 'Jahresbericht 1946 für die Pfarrgemeinde Arnstadt (Stadt)', 2/2/1947.

²⁵ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Leutenberg, 2/2/47.

²⁶ BEA, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Bericht über die sozialen Verhältnisse und Notstände der kath. Umsiedler in Bezirk Erfurt-Ost', undated.

²⁷ DAW, Pers. Dok. Kümmert, Robert, '25 Jahre Pfarrer in Bad Salzungen', pp. 33-34; see also: BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR 'Grundsätzliches' 1946-1959, Erfurt to Weihbischof Adolf Bollte (Fulda), 24/10/47.

²⁸ BEA, Stellenakten, Apolda, Apolda to Freusberg, 14/3/47; see also: BEA, Stellenakten, Andisleben, Pfarrkurat Fripper to Freusberg, 14/3/47.

above, to open hearts and to awaken interest in the care of diaspora communities. The nouns ‘awakening’ (Weckung) and ‘opening’ (Öffnung) indicate beginning and it can be inferred that, even two years after the end of the war, there was little interest in the care of refugees.

The Catholic Church also announced that a week would be dedicated to the new citizens in order to oil social relations between them and indigenous Thuringians. According to a proclamation of 7 December 1947:

In the period 7-14 December a week for the new citizens takes place. This week has the object of easing, through appropriate measures, the harsh lot of the new citizens and, in general, to awaken understanding for this burning question and to mobilise a readiness to help. The command of ‘neighbourly love’ demands from us Christians that we determinedly and actively facilitate genuine help. Therefore, this office calls all Catholics to have understanding for these measures and to support them according to ability.²⁹

Again, the use of the verbs ‘to awaken’ (wecken) and ‘to mobilize’ (aktivieren) reflected an unwillingness in the wider community to help and to deal with the ‘burning question’ of the new citizens. In a similar vein, the office of the Thuringian Commission for New Citizens called for the integration of refugees amongst communities that were unwilling to co-operate.³⁰ While both the churches and the secular authorities were eager to promote the acceptance of the newcomers, the local population was reluctant to do so.

In all, the overwhelming reaction of local communities to the arrival and co-habitation of the refugees was detached.³¹ For example, the first sentence of an article in *Glaube und Heimat* by a pastor in Marienstift stated: ‘Nearly no day passes in which we do not hear bitter complaints by evacuees about the hard-heartedness and lack of compassion of the

²⁹ BEA, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propsteipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 7/12/47.

³⁰ LKAE, A 750 IV, 163-181, ‘Sitzung der Landeskommision für Neubürger am 20. März 1948 in Weimar’.

³¹ See, in general, *ThHStAW*, Ministerium des Innern, 649, 33, ‘Jahresbericht 1946’, 30/12/46; *GuH*, 1/33, 8/12/46, ‘Einander erkennen – einander verstehen’, F. Högner, p. 2; *GuH*, 2/8, 23/2/47, ‘Nochmals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute’, p.1; *GuH*, 2/10, 9/3/47, ‘Abermals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute’, p. 1; T. A. Seidel, ‘Befreiung oder Besatzung?...', p. 35; B. Andrees, p. 112; H. Rudolph, p. 22; M. Krauss, p. 34ff; M. Beer, p. 100ff; cf. situation in Saxony: B. Mitzscherlich, p. 564.

Thuringian population during our consultation hours.’³² It was often reported that local doctors gave priority treatment to members of the indigenous population and many refugees received medical attention too late or not at all.³³ One report noted that the evacuees mostly lived amongst a population that had no empathy for their condition, gave them neither shelter nor clothing and treated them with distaste as intruders.³⁴ The immigrants were seen as trespassing.³⁵ In the Arnstadt district, tensions grew over time and the division between the new and old citizens was considerable, particularly between refugee tenants and their indigenous landlords. One *Bürgermeister* even attempted, amidst great opposition, to have a dead refugee buried as a suicide in the far, isolated corner of the local cemetery.³⁶ The Aschara population viewed the newcomers with disdain and, throughout the district overseen by the Neudietendorf Pastoral Care Office, the native population was distant and had little comprehension of the refugees’ plight.³⁷ Elsewhere, an evangelical pastor observed ‘a shocking lack of care’, while the Catholic priest at Stepfershausen in the Meiningen Commisariat commented that the population had ‘no heart’ for the re-settlers.³⁸

³² *GuH*, 1/9, 23/6/1946, ‘Barmherzigkeit. Ein offenes Wort an die Thüringer’, p. 1; see also: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Gotha-Siebleben; H. Siebert, p. 70.

³³ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 172, ‘Sitzung der Landeskommision für Neubürger am 20. März 1948 in Weimar’.

³⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘The Work of Pastoral Care in (sic!) behalf of the East-Evacuated Catholics in Thuringia and its Difficulties’, undated.

³⁵ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 147-148, Allstedt/Helme to the LKR, 23/5/1947.

³⁶ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 129, ‘Jahresbericht 1946 für die Arnstadt (Land)’, 2/2/1947; also, conflict over kitchen facilities: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946’.

³⁷ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Tätigkeitsbericht 1946’, Aschara to the BGVE, 30/1/1947; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Bericht über das Jahr 1947’, Alach/Ringleben; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Jahresbericht der Seelsorgestelle Neudietendorf über das Jahr 1946’; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Gotha-Siebleben; *ThHStAW*, Ministerium des Innern, 649, 33, ‘Jahresbericht 1946’, 30/12/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946’; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Waltersleben, Erfurt, 1/2/47.

³⁸ *LKAE*, A 593 I, 23, Pf. Hans Joachim Kuhnt to Landesverband der Inneren Mission, 12/9/46; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Stepfershausen, Meiningen, 1/2/47; *GuH*, 2/40, 5/10/47, ‘Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?’, Schröter (Altenburg), p. 2; *GuH*, 3/38, 19/9/48, ‘Kirchlichkeit und Barmherzigkeit’, Gennrich, p. 1.

The church authorities were well aware of the gulf between the old and the new citizens, recognised their failure and acknowledged that there could be no quick solution.³⁹ According to a report submitted to the LKR, integration demanded time and it was ‘probably a question of the generation’.⁴⁰ The political authorities, by contrast, seem to have been rather more optimistic and viewed the process of the integration of the refugees as much more successful. According to the 1947 annual report prepared for the Thuringian Ministry of the Interior, the relationship between the two communities had ‘changed fundamentally’ during that year, largely as a result of ‘the untiring work of anti-fascist organisations and the elucidating work of the press’.⁴¹ It seems likely, however, that the communists were grossly exaggerating the degree of progress that had been made, probably because they wanted to emphasise – for political reasons – the degree to which the policies of the SED were uniting the population.⁴² The success of the efforts of the socialist bureaucracy naturally legitimated their existence. Yet, the official SED optimism about the integration of refugees was revealed to be a façade in a regional meeting of the SED at Seega. In reply to the speech of the local chairman, which stressed the efforts of the party in leading the way toward integration and an alleviation of need, a visiting pastor remarked that the situation of deprivation could only be overcome with the help of external aid. He continued in stating that the chairman’s speech was ‘beating around the bush’ of the real nature of the issues and was merely ‘a drop on a hot stone’.⁴³ The pastor also, allegedly, blamed the working class for not correcting the situation although they had the power to do so.⁴⁴ By no means was there the social integration that the 1947 report of the Ministry of the Interior implied. In all, the churches, in a great

³⁹ *GuH*, 3/12, 21/3/48, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 148, Allstedt/Helme to the LKR, 23/5/1947.

⁴¹ *ThHStAW*, Ministerium des Innern, 650, 157, ‘Jahresbericht 1947’.

⁴² Cf. R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 67.

⁴³ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/251-2, ‘Bericht zu den reaktionären Äußerungen des Pfarrers Barz aus Göllingen in der SED Versammlung 18.9.47 in Seega’; cf. *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/252, ‘Aussagen des Bürgermeisters Albert Rödiger über die Diskussionsrede des Pfarrers Barz aus Göllingen, in der öffentl. Versammlung am 18.9.47’.

⁴⁴ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/252, ‘Aussagen des Bürgermeisters Albert Rödiger über die Diskussionsrede des Pfarrers Barz aus Göllingen, in der öffentl. Versammlung am 18.9.47’; *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/253, ‘Diskussionsredner zu der öffentlichen Versammlung der Ortsgruppe Seega am 19.9.47, Pfarrer a.D. u. Schriftsteller Heinz P’.

many places, were unsuccessful in their vigorous attempts to influence faith communities to welcome the refugees.

Why the churches were not more successful

Two factors undermined church efforts in integrating the refugees with the native population. Firstly, most refugees did not wish to remain in Thuringia but instead desired to return to their homes in the East. Evacuees throughout Germany shared the same sentiment. In Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria, for instance, as in Thuringia, the refugees were united in their longing for home and most estimated that their exile would last only several weeks.⁴⁵ In the early stages of settlement, many therefore did not make a concerted effort to adapt to life in a foreign land. The attempt of a *Bürgermeister* near Gotha to speed up the social incorporation of the new citizens by blatantly announcing that a return was not possible was answered with tears. Instead, the local pastor urged the secular authorities and the LKR to proceed slowly with their integration policies as most of the refugees had made no effort to become involved in the community and had remained distant with their dialect, customs and way of life. By pursuing this slow approach, the re-settlers would then be occupied with work, could develop a measure of hope and eventually become part of society of their own accord.⁴⁶ Expelled from their ancestral homelands and forced into a strange new land where there was insufficient food, accommodation and clothing, the newcomers experienced tumultuous feelings of loss and isolation. Many evacuees in Thuringia did not attempt to adapt to a new life and were therefore, to a certain extent, responsible for their own feelings of alienation.

Secondly, the bond between church and society was weakened after 12 years of Nazism and seven years of war. The enduring post-war need and the churches' inability to overcome the widespread deprivation, as shown in chapter four, exacerbated this division. The result of the churches increasing alienation from 'normal' people was that

⁴⁵ H. Rudolph, p. 16 (n. 52); see also: M. Beer, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁶ *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 141, Pf. Linz (Gotha) to the LKR, 11/3/1947.

the moral imperatives of the clergy to welcome and to embrace the refugees fell on deaf ears. Communities simply acted in their own best interests.

The effects of Nazism were particularly deep-seated amongst young people who neglected the church, were ignorant of religion and acted contrary to church morals. For instance, the Kefferhausen *Bürgermeister* wrote: ‘The twelve years of Hitler government and particularly the war have left deep marks behind. The youth were completely duped.’⁴⁷ For the war generation, the Nazi world-view was often all it knew. In many places after the conflict, young people became indifferent to religion and fell into scepticism, nihilism and the pursuit of pleasure that considered nobody but themselves.⁴⁸ The priest at Rohrberg noted, for example, that youth in his pastorate were no different from elsewhere in Thuringia and pursued their own pleasure above all else.⁴⁹ The fault, in the opinion of the priest, lay with the parents who ‘worked against’ the Catholic Church and allowed them to go dancing instead of attending church. The parents, through their bad example, did not instruct their children in ‘true Christian neighbourly love’.⁵⁰ The lack of religious knowledge amongst the youth was highlighted in *Glaube und Heimat*, which dedicated space to answering young persons’ questions

⁴⁷ BFA, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsatzliches’, the Bürgermeister of Kefferhausen to the BGVF, 16/6/47; see also: C. Koch, p. 37; A. Eckstaedt, p. 362; *GuH*, 1/24, 6/10/46, ‘Jugend predigt!’, Pf. Dr. W. Hurek, p. 3; *GuH*, 1/27, 27/10/46, ‘Heimkehr des modernen Menschen?’, Sup. Bauer (Stadtröda), p.1; *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, ‘Warum gehen wir am Wesentlichen vorbei?’, Prof. Dr. Kayser-Petersen (Jena), pp. 1-2; *GuH*, 2/37, 14/9/47, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, ‘Ein Wort an den jungen Mann’, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/2, 11/1/48, ‘Die Situation der Jugend und die Kirche’, Pf. Neumann, pp. 1-2; *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, ‘Seelsorge an den Männern, besonders an den heimkehrenden Soldaten’, undated; at Jena: J. Fügner, p. 34.

⁴⁸ See, for example: *GuH*, 1/3, 12/5/46, ‘Junge Gemeinde’, Köhler, p. 3; *GuH*, 2/23, 7/6/47, ‘Fragen der Jugend an die Kirchen’, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/2, 11/1/48, ‘Die Situation der Jugend und die Kirche’, Pf. Neumann, pp. 1-2; *GuH*, 3/37, 12/9/48, ‘Der Ruf an die jungen Christen’, W. Ölschner, p. 4; *GuH*, 2/11, 16/3/47, ‘Wie helfen wir der Jugend?’, E. Böhmer, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/8, 22/2/48, ‘Wie die Jugend über die Kirche denkt’, p. 4; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Jena to the BGVF, 19/9/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Prof. Dr. Gerhard Möbus (Jena) to the BGVF, 10/9/46; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Frühjahrsbericht Leutenberg 1947’, 14/6/47, C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 231.

⁴⁹ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Rohrberg to the BGVF, 13/4/48; *GuH*, 1/31, 24/11/46, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde: “Zum Totensonntag”’, p. 3; *GuH*, 2/9, 2/3/47, ‘Gnade in gnadenlose Zeit’, K. Linder (Altenburg), p. 1; the pursuit of pleasure was of course not restricted to youth: *GuH*, 2/15, 13/4/47, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Bleibe deiner Kirche treu!’, H. Lorenz (Tabarz), p. 4; *GuH*, 3/11, 14/3/48, ‘Freie christliche Jugend’, Scriba (Rudisleben), p. 1; *GuH*, 3/50, 12/12/48, ‘Jungen Fragen’, H. Behrend, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Rohrberg to the BGVF, 13/4/48; cf. *GuH*, 1/31, 24/11/46, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde: “Zum Totensonntag”’, p. 3; *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, ‘Warum gehen wir am Wesentlichen vorbei?’ Prof. Dr. Kayser-Petersen (Jena), pp. 1-2; *GuH*, 2/38, 21/9/47, ‘Worauf kommt es an?’ p. 1.

about religion. The inquiries related to seemingly axiomatic Christian values. For example: ‘Is a Christian allowed to steal?’ The Church also found questions about the sixth commandment (concerning adultery) ‘deeply distressing’.⁵¹

Such was the dislocation between the churches and their faithful that even adults were often ignorant of the ‘truths’ of the Catholic faith.⁵² One report on the state of pastoral care in Bilzingsleben noted: ‘The religious knowledge of a great many Catholics in *all* communities is *very, very* slight...many have only barely “saved” the Lord’s Prayer from their youth.’⁵³ Freusberg lamented in August 1946 that approximately 50,000 Catholics remained aloof from classes in religious instruction.⁵⁴ As there were approximately 397,400 Catholics in the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese at that time, roughly one in eight of all Catholics did not receive an education in Christian beliefs.⁵⁵ There was also considerable ignorance in the TeK. The result of a poetry competition held in *Glaube und Heimat* in January 1948 reflected the lack of basic religious knowledge amongst many of the contestants.⁵⁶ In June 1948, the results were published. The majority of poems reflected ideas that were, according to the judges, characterised by ‘barely biblically-supported Protestantism’, ‘loose doctrine’, ‘beliefs in God that bordered on mysticism’, ‘few conscious testimonies to Christ’ and ‘very frequently...insipid confession[s]’.⁵⁷ The subject matter was moreover superficial and featured trite rhyme such as ‘Not – Tod’, ‘Schmerz – Herz’, ‘Liebe – Triebe’. The judges were astounded at the poor understanding of basic Christian teaching. It is significant that the “poets” were the readership of *Glaube und Heimat* and should, therefore, have been expected to be more educated in Christian doctrine and beliefs.

⁵¹ *GuH*, 3/50, 12/12/48, ‘Jungen Fragen’, H. Behrend, p. 2.

⁵² Religious instruction for adults, for example: *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Silbershausen to the BGVF, 11/12/47.

⁵³ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, ‘Bericht aus der Seelsorgsarbeit, besonders Religionsunterricht’, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 25/4/47 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1946, ‘Bericht über die seelsorgliche Lage’, Freusberg, 9/8/46.

⁵⁵ H. A. Welsh, ‘Thüringen’, p. 849.

⁵⁶ *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, ‘Preis ausschreiben’, p. 3.

⁵⁷ *GuH*, 3/19-20, 16/5/48, ‘Zu unserem Preis ausschreiben’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 4.

Simply put, the post-war institutional churches lost touch with their communities.

According to one author in *Glaube und Heimat*:

The pastor and the community members have distanced themselves so far apart from one another – their affairs [are] so different, the estrangement of the laity from the church is so great – that from one day to the next [it is] impossible to be able to expect [a] packed community gathering.⁵⁸

Calls to involvement in church life and its manifestations often went unheeded and the pastor was left alone in his duties.⁵⁹ All people wanted from the churches was to be comforted and to find solace. Most were simply not interested in being challenged about their daily behaviour and attitudes. People were concerned, first and foremost, with their own plight and when the Christian Church challenged their conduct and attempted to influence their behaviour, people objected and did not respond. For example, the priest at Rohrberg remarked that when he sermonised about issues such as the pursuit of pleasure, the abuse of alcohol, the return of stolen goods and the help required by the re-settlers he was confronted with a chorus of scratching, coughing and interruptions. The priest concluded that sermons of this nature were unpopular and endangered attendance at the church services. He deduced: ‘It is the curse of the scant [klein] conditions that they often also make men base [klein].’⁶⁰ None of the “believers” wanted their conscience probed and many were prepared to attend church only so long as it did not interfere with their daily lives and behaviour.⁶¹

The result of the separation between the church authorities and the community at large was that people disregarded calls to Christian duty and most people acted purely in their own best interest. This was the case in regard to the refugee problem. Far from helping,

⁵⁸ *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, ‘Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?’, Dr. Dawczewski, p. 2; see also: *GuH*, 3/34, 22/8/48, ‘Evangelische Männergemeinde fordert!’ H. Wunder, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *GuH*, 2/52, 28/12/47, ‘Unsere Jahresaufgabe: Mitarbeiter!’, Oberkirchenrat Köhler, p. 4; *GuH*, 2/5, 2/2/47, ‘Wirkt mit am Aufbau der neuen ev. Kirchenordnung Thüringens’, D.W. Macholz, p. 1; *GuH*, 3/5, 1/2/48, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde: Mitarbeit’, p. 3; *GuH*, 3/17-18, 2/5/48, ‘Hier Spricht die Gemeinde – Antwort auf die Frage: “Was nun?”’, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, ‘Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?’, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Rohrberg to the BGVF, 13/4/48.

⁶¹ In general: *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, ‘Weg aus dem Chaos’, Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Griez), p. 4.

many locals attempted to profit from the plight of the evacuees. There were many chances for opportunists to exploit and one observer remarked that there were a large number of people who were able to alleviate the need but, in order to profit from it, did not.⁶² A priest at Gotha remarked in his report for 1946 that the refugees were often the objects of exploitation.⁶³ There was also considerable bitterness over the heartlessness of the well-endowed who had not lost a great deal during the war or in the post-war period. These people sought to enrich themselves further at the expense of the evacuees in terms of money, belongings and/or labour.⁶⁴

Not only did some Thuringians exploit the refugees for profit but they often begrudged them financial and material support.⁶⁵ In many cases, family was the first priority and communities simply could not offer the aid that was required by the newcomers.⁶⁶ On the other hand, it was actually the wealthier sections of the community that proved the most unwilling to provide assistance. These people acted in blatant self-interest. According to the 1946 *Jahresbericht* prepared for the Thuringian Ministry of the Interior: 'At best, the new citizens are accepted in the poorest districts. They are, however, icily rejected in wealthy rural districts, which remain undamaged by the war.'⁶⁷ Despite the socialists' undoubted antipathy to the bourgeoisie, the report is corroborated, for instance, by the situation at Bilzingsleben where, reportedly, the people capable of offering aid were so hard-hearted that they left the poor to their fate. The result was often lingering death for

⁶² H. Nitsche, pp. 16-17; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Frühjahrsbericht 1947', Leutenberg, 14/6/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Gotha-Siebleben, 28/1/47.

⁶³ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Gotha-Siebleben, 28/1/47.

⁶⁴ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht des Seelsorgebezirkes Gräfenroda über das Jahr 1946'; *BEA*, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Rohrberg to the BGVP, 13/4/48; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Gotha-Siebleben, 28/1/47.

⁶⁵ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Gotha-Siebleben, 28/1/47; C. Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots...*, p. 24.

⁶⁶ For example: *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Stepfershausen, Meiningen, 1/2/47; *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, 'Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946', Waltersleben, Erfurt, 1/2/47; *GuH*, 2/10, 9/3/47, 'Abermals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute', p. 1.

⁶⁷ *ThHStAW*, Ministerium des Innern, 649, 33, 'Jahresbericht 1946', 30/12/46; see also: P. Bucher (ed.), p. 367.

many refugees.⁶⁸ One author in *Glaube und Heimat* observed that the unwillingness to give was due to the inherent frugal disposition of Thuringians, who were historically sparing and restrained in giving. Thuringia was also not a wealthy province.⁶⁹ Regardless of this, it seems that where people shared common burdens and a similar lot, the immigrants and the natives on the whole coexisted harmoniously. Where the gap in wealth was yawning and the common lot of impoverishment did not exist, relations between the locals and the newcomers were icy. Ironically, those most capable of giving aid were those most unwilling to do so.

The loose bond between the church authorities and their communities was not strong enough to compel believers to act in a manner that was contrary to their own self-interest. There can be little doubt that a less selfish attitude on the part of the local population would have eased significantly the integration of the newcomers. While sudden and hurried change exacerbated the dislocation felt by the refugees, empathy on the part of the local population, especially church communities, would have gone a long way to welcoming the new citizens into society. As a Protestant pastor stated in the concluding sentence of an article advocating compassion towards the refugees: ‘A friendly word is often ... a great favour.’⁷⁰ From the point of view of the evacuees themselves, what they required was not so much mercy or compassion – ‘mercy we ask from our Lord God’ – but rather to be treated justly.⁷¹ Selfishness precluded empathy but a willingness to accept the refugees as equals was paramount to social integration.

⁶⁸ BFA, BGVF, Kirche in der DDR ‘Grundsätzliches’ 1946-1959, Bilzingsleben to the BGVF, 13/11/47.

⁶⁹ GuH, 2/10, 9/3/47, ‘Abermals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute’, p.1.

⁷⁰ LKAE, A 593 I, ‘Rundschreiben der Thüringer evangelische Kirche’, A 593/10.12, 32; GuH, 1/9, 23/6/1946, ‘Barmherzigkeit. Ein offenes Wort an die Thüringer’, p. 2.

⁷¹ GuH, 1/16, 11/8/1946, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde: Barmherzigkeit’, Ing. Seidler (Holzthaleben über Mühlhausen), p. 3; reply to: GuH, 1/9, 23/6/1946, ‘Barmherzigkeit. Ein offenes Wort an die Thüringer’, pp. 1-2; see also: GuH, 1/24, 6/10/46, ‘Hier spricht die Gemeinde: Ruf zum Dienst, ein Wort an die Umsiedler’, G., Hardisleben, p. 3.

Conclusion

The aim of the church authorities was to ensure that the refugees were no longer seen as aliens, but as ‘citizens with the saints and partakers in God’s household’.⁷² Both the Catholic and Protestant churches attempted to prevail upon the local populations to accept the newcomers unreservedly. Church leaders energetically promoted initiatives such as special refugee church services, the creation of *Patenschaften* and the establishment of the week for the new citizens. However, many communities in Thuringia demonstrated a lack of will to help and ignored the entreaties of their clergy to regard the care of the displaced persons among them as a moral imperative.⁷³

The refugees themselves viewed their stay in Thuringia as temporary and therefore made little effort toward integration with the existing population. In addition, the bond between church and society had been loosened by the Nazi period, six years of war and the churches’ inability to overcome the enduring deprivation of the post-war period. As a result, the churches were unable to influence believers to act in a manner that was altruistic. The selfishness of native Thuringians in the situation of need summarily ignored the interests of the often destitute refugees. Faith communities in post-war Thuringia did not actively or intentionally persecute the new arrivals, but, by focusing on their own concerns and disregarding the calls of their churches to help, they neglected those whose need was greatest.

As shown in chapter four, the religious revival in 1945 was short-lived. It was also superficial. People were more than willing to take what they needed from the churches and receive a degree of consolation and support. However, when the churches attempted to develop a concern amongst the local community for outsiders, people were simply not interested in listening. The popularity of religion in 1945 did not leave an enduring

⁷² *LKAE*, A 593 I, Beirat des Kirchendienstes Ost to the LKR, 11/2/47; see also: *GuH*, 1/9, 23/6/1946, ‘Barmherzigkeit. Ein offenes Wort an die Thüringer,’ p. 2; P. Bucher (ed.), pp. 367-377; *GuH*, 2/8, 23/2/47, ‘Liebet euch untereinander und seid glaubensstark!’, Pf. Müller, p. 2; *GuH*, 2/6, 9/2/47, ‘Haben Flüchtlinge in den Gemeinden eine Aufgabe’, Pf. Müller, p. 3.

⁷³ *BEA*, BGVE/BAE-M, 125, 1947-1957, ‘Jahresbericht über das Jahr 1946’, Gotha-Siebleben; *GuH*, 1/33, 8/12/46, ‘Einander erkennen – einander verstehen’, F. Högner, p. 2.

legacy of Christian 'neighbourly love' that was able to abolish introverted self-centredness. The inability of the churches to manipulate native Thuringians to embrace their refugee co-religionists reflected that there were definite limits to the churches' social influence.

6: The churches, the Nazi past and denazification

Denazification was the Allies' main weapon in smashing fascism and rooting out Nazi elements from public life.¹ In the Soviet zone, it was an important part of the 'anti-fascist democratic transformation' and necessary for a 'cultural renewal'. In fact, denazification was generally more comprehensive in the SBZ than in the Western zones and was particularly sweeping in important areas of public life.² Most former Nazis in the administration and industry, for instance, were released from service.³ Up to 25 March 1949, 512,990 people had appeared before denazification commissions of whom approximately 30 percent had been dismissed from their posts.⁴ In Thuringia in 1945, the SMATh quickly dismissed all bureaucrats who had been Nazi party members before April 1933. Despite the importance attached to denazification, however, the Soviets largely left the churches to their own devices.

Allowed a free hand by the Russians, the Thuringian churches failed to execute comprehensive processes of self-denazification. Not one Catholic priest was a member of the Nazi party and the Church therefore did not dismiss a single clergyman from office. The Church contended that it had no reason to denazify. On the other hand, the burden of the past lay heavy upon the post-war TeK. Of the regional German Protestant churches, the German Christians, the pro-Nazi church faction, were most radical in Thuringia and possessed significant support. The Thuringian Church was known as the most nazified

¹ T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 166; D. van Melis, p. 42; H. A. Welsh, "Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung"..., pp. 84-85; O. Kappelt, p. 247ff; Ruth-Kristin Röbler, (ed.), *Die Entnazifizierungspolitik der KPD/SED 1945-1948, Dokumente und Materialien*, (Goldbach: 1994), p. 13.

² H. A. Welsh, "Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung"..., pp. 84-86, 103; see also: O. Kappelt, pp. 238-239; L. Kettenacker, pp. 18-19; R.-K. Röbler (ed.), pp. 13-18.

³ L. Kettenacker, pp. 18-19; H. A. Welsh, "Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung"..., p. 91; for the figures on those incarcerated in Soviet internment camps and the number of deaths resulting from them, see: O Kappelt, pp. 242-243.

⁴ R.-K. Röbler (ed.), p. 274.

evangelical church in Germany.⁵ Despite this, the denazification process in the TeK was limited.

It is the purpose of this chapter is to show how the churches interacted with the secular authorities regarding denazification and to explain *why* the churches failed to carry out a thorough process of ‘self-purification’. In doing so, it is possible to develop a better understanding of the privileged post-war position of the churches. The argument follows in four sections: the interaction of the churches with the secular authorities, the course of denazification in the TeK and, then, the Catholic Church, and reasons for the lack of denazification.

The secular authorities and denazification in the churches

Although the Americans sought a thorough process of denazification on their arrival in Thuringia in April 1945, the churches were largely responsible for their own ‘purification’.⁶ The occupation authorities decreed that ‘ardent’ National Socialists would not be tolerated in public office and many former Nazi party members or sympathisers were dismissed.⁷ American denazification measures against church officials nonetheless were not widespread.⁸ The American authorities did interrogate a number of church officials including one senior TeK official, *Kreiskirchenrat* Schenk. Schenk reported that, while he did join the Nazi party in 1932 out of idealism, he was never active in the party and had never held a party office.⁹ The Americans temporarily imprisoned Schenk and the former bishop of the TeK, Hugo Rönck. The Americans also requested information

⁵ *LKAE*, A 776, 107, ‘The Rebirth of the German Church – Wiedergeburt der deutschen Kirche’, Stewart Herman, The Stanhope Press, Kent, pp. 24-26, 15/7/47.

⁶ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, ‘Niederschrift’, 1/5/45.; *EZAB*, 2/323, 52, the LKR to the EKD, 10/12/46; G. Besier, ‘Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang’, p. 139; T. A. Seidel, ‘Im Wechsel der Systeme...’, p. 342.

⁷ *LKAE*, A 239 III, 33, Dr. Schanze’s conversation with *Landrat* Dreykorn in Weimar, 2/7/45; *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, the American occupation authorities in Erfurt to Freusberg, 12/6/45.

⁸ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 27; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 220.

⁹ *LKAE*, A 239 III, 34, ‘Bericht’, E. Schenk, 15/6/45.

from the Catholic churchman, Josef Freusberg, on the affiliations of his clergymen and demanded the submission of questionnaires on past behaviour. Freusberg submitted his form on 30 April. Freusberg denied involvement in most Nazi organisations, though he did admit to membership in three including the National Socialist welfare organisation (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt). He also stated that he had been subjected to Gestapo interrogation on account of suspected political activity.¹⁰

The SMATh also allowed the churches to execute their own denazification processes.¹¹ In some areas, however, Russian denazification measures indirectly affected the Church. At Gera-Zwötigen, for example, a pastor complained to Mitzenheim about Russian measures that endangered the authority of the Church.¹² Despite this, the Soviets refrained from intervention in the churches and, similar to issues arising out of religious instruction, ignored and restrained the attempts of individual junior Russian officers and German communists to practice more thorough denazification.¹³ One Red Army officer, Major Arustamov, who was the author of a report on former Nazi party members in the service of the churches in June 1946, recommended the dismissal of former National Socialists in the Gotha and Eisenach districts.¹⁴ Despite Arustamov's recommendation and the large number of former Nazis implicated in the report (54 in total), the SMATh made no effort to force their dismissal.

The SED also sought to have church officials removed from office.¹⁵ One of these men was a former SS man. The Kranichfeld pastor, Werner H., had reached the rank of lieutenant in the reserve security police and was stationed at Weimar during the war.¹⁶

¹⁰ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, 'Fragebogen', 30/4/45

¹¹ EZAB, 2/323, 53, Mitzenheim to the Oberbürgermeister of Eisenach, 28/12/46.

¹² LKAE, A 239 III, 152, Pf. Simcik to Mitzenheim, 6/12/45.

¹³ In general: J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, p. 390.

¹⁴ Horst Möller, Alexandr O. Tschubarjan (eds.), *Die Politik der Sowjetischen Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD)*, (Munich: 2005), p. 106 (dated 29 June 1946).

¹⁵ See, for example: LKAE, A 239 IV, the FDGB to the LKR, 4/10/45; LKAE, A 239 IV, the LKR to the FDGB, 5/11/45.

¹⁶ ThHStAW, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/213-214, the LKR to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/11/47.

Werner H. returned after the war and received permission to hold church services and to provide pastoral care. In the course of denazification measures, Werner H. was officially released from his clerical duties. He nonetheless remained in office ‘involved in only an acting capacity’. The SED demanded further punitive measures against Werner H. on the basis of his alleged membership in the SS: ‘According to our opinion, there was no police officer who was not simultaneously a member of the SS.’¹⁷ The LKR avoided any reference to the man’s membership in the SS and responded that the decision of the hearing was final.¹⁸ Werner H. remained in the service of the TeK.

That the TeK was permitted to ignore and reject the attempts of the SED to manipulate its process of self-denazification is very surprising given that the German communists were intricately involved in post-war denazification. For instance, they staffed tribunals from April 1945 which implemented Soviet denazification policy.¹⁹ This cooperation between the Russians and the German socialists led to swift and comprehensive denazification such as at Leipzig and Halle.²⁰ SED members also commanded significant influence in the 262 denazification commissions in the SBZ created at the end of 1946.²¹ It could not have been more different with regard to the Thuringian churches. The tolerance of the SMATh in permitting the TeK, and the Catholic Church, to order their own denazification ensured that the door was shut in the face of the German communists.

Even when publicly attacked for protecting former Nazis, the TeK enjoyed continued freedom from state intervention. In particular, a critical article published by the Weimar-based *Abendpost* on 21 May 1946 threatened church autonomy.²² The article, ‘Wo steht

¹⁷ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/210-211, SED Landesvorstand Thüringen to the Ministry of the Interior, 19/9/47.

¹⁸ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/213-214, the LKR to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/11/47.

¹⁹ J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 370-371; H. A. Welsh, “‘Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung’...”, p. 96; O. Kappelt, p. 228ff; R.-K. Röbler (ed.), pp. 30-32.

²⁰ G. Pritchard, pp. 83-84.

²¹ H. A. Welsh, “‘Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung’...”, p. 91.

²² *Abendpost*, 21/5/46, ‘Wo steht die evangelische Kirche Thüringens?’, anonymous, pp. 1-2; see also: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 252-254.

die evangelische Kirche Thüringens?’ (Where does the Thuringian Evangelical Church stand?), railed against the TeK for allowing former Nazis to remain at their posts:

Herr Landesbischof Witzenheim [Witz: joke], who is responsible for personnel politics, has not only done nothing to dismiss formerly active Nazis from their offices but he has threatened to burden the Church with their [political] legacy ...²³

The anonymous author noted that 85 percent of the pastorate were former German Christians and listed various former Nazis still in office. Pastor K., for example, had been a member of the Nazi party since 1928 and had been awarded the gold party badge. The lack of denazification entailed the ‘murder of democracy’ and represented the danger of ‘reactionary fascist elements to church life’. The author lamented above all a missed opportunity and placed the blame squarely on Mitzenheim.²⁴ Despite the questionable reliability of some of the author’s “facts”, the allegation that the Church was not thoroughly denazified struck a raw nerve.

As expected, the reaction of the TeK leadership was passionate as the threat of state intervention loomed large.²⁵ Dr. Stiegel wrote an acrimonious letter to the editorial staff of the *Abendpost* as he viewed the article as reminiscent of attacks on the Church during the Nazi era. Stiegel demanded, furthermore, that the ‘false information’ in the article be retracted.²⁶ Dr Hertzsch wrote a lengthy reply to the editor and published an article in *Glaube und Heimat* on 16 June 1946 in rebuttal of the *Abendpost* article.²⁷ He did not deny that former German Christians remained in the TeK but, rather, he maintained that they were only a minority (only 13.3 percent of the pastorate at the end of the war). The former German Christians had moreover, according to Hertzsch, realised the error of their ways and were involved whole-heartedly in the reconstruction of church life. Perhaps the

²³ *Abendpost*, 21/5/46, ‘Wo steht die evangelische Kirche Thüringens?’, anonymous, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵ T. A. Seidel, “‘...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart’...”, p. 176.

²⁶ *EZAB*, 2/148, Dr. Stiegel to the *Abendpost* editors, 6/46.

²⁷ *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, ‘Wie steht es um die Thüringer evangelische Kirche?’, Dr. Hertzsch, p. 3; see also: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 257-258.

most vigorous defence of denazification in the TeK was Mitzenheim's letter to the Thuringian presidential office – where the stakes were highest. Mitzenheim defended the pastors named by the article and challenged the 'facts'. It was simply not true that 85 percent of the pastorate were German Christians.²⁸ Despite the article that made the limited denazification in the TeK public knowledge, the SMATh did not intervene.

Limited denazification in the TeK

There were significant problems with denazification throughout the regional Protestant churches in the SBZ, largely due to the German Christian legacy.²⁹ The TeK pastorate was deeply scarred by German Christianity and it required a denazification process in order to act as a legitimate moral guide for believers.³⁰ It was clear, as a result, that the sternest and most important task of the TeK in the post-war period was how it dealt with the past.³¹ Walter Zimmermann, a member of the LKR, remarked that if the German Christian issue was not settled then the Church would not be capable of social action in the post-war conditions.³² Despite this imperative, denazification in the TeK was incomplete.

Many TeK officials and pastors were German Christians or were associated with German Christianity during the Nazi period, and several dominated top positions in the Church. A Gestapo agent and German Christian, Paul Lehmann, was a member of the LKR from

²⁸ *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 4/6/46; *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Präsidialdirektor Staas, 6/46; see also: T. Björkman (ed.), p. 25.

²⁹ J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, p. 400.

³⁰ On church responsibility in general see: *EZAB*, 2/324, 43, General Lucius D. Clay to Bishop Wurm, 14/4/47; on denazification as a legitimating factor in foundation of GDR in October 1949 see: H. A. Welsh, "'Antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung'...", pp. 84-85; D. van Melis, pp. 42, 51.

³¹ *LKAE*, A 239 III, Lau (Sachsen) to Mitzenheim, 12/7/45; M. Mitzenheim, *50 Jahre im Dienste der Kirche...*, p. 92; *GuH*, 3/52, 26/12/48, 'Wo stehen wir gegenwärtig in der Entwicklung?', G. Bauer (Stadtröda), pp. 2-3; *LKAE*, A 155, 59, 'Die rechtliche Neuordnung der Thüringer evangelische Kirche', *Oberkirchenrat* G. Lotz; *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Bishop Wurm, 3/1/47; *LKAE*, A 130 II, Dr. Schanze to Mitzenheim, 16/5/45; *EZAB*, 2/148, Dr. Schanze to the EKD (Dr. Siegel), 16/6/46; for secondary literature see, for instance: J. J. Seidel, 'Abkehr vom "Deutschen Christentum"...', p. 42; T. A. Seidel, "'...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart'...", p. 174.

³² *LKAE*, A 130 II, Walter Zimmermann to Dr. Schanze, 18/5/45.

1933 until 1943.³³ The bishop, Hugo Rönck, was also a German Christian. Rönck assumed leadership of the TeK as president on 15 March 1943, and, on 6 April 1943, he legislated to give himself unimpeachable powers to administer the TeK without synodical consultation. In early 1945, he appointed himself bishop.³⁴ Rönck had been a member of the Nazi party since 1928 and had been awarded the gold party badge.³⁵ According to one post-war report, Rönck performed his duties ‘with the help of *Mein Kampf* as the bible and the Gestapo as church disciplinarians’.³⁶ Due to the German Christian influence, many pastors left the Thuringian Church for other churches throughout Germany. One report stated that, of the 800 pastors in the TeK, ‘around 350’ were German Christians.³⁷ An internal Russian report from the area of Gotha noted that of the 248 Protestant pastors, 54 were former members of the Nazi party.³⁸ A further nine former Nazi party members and 23 German Christians were amongst the 53 Protestant pastors in Eisenach. Another observer, a churchman from Stuttgart, stated that the Thuringian pastorate had largely submitted to German Christianity.³⁹

There were some ‘knee-jerk’ denazification measures in the TeK in the first months after the war. German Christian superintendents were dismissed and replaced by members of the Confessing Church or neutrals, while German Christian councils were dissolved or replaced.⁴⁰ Other church employees were also taken into custody by mid-July 1945. These included the administrators Paul Laue and Erich Haugk and other staff, Wilhelm

³³ EZAB, 2/148, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 6/1/46.

³⁴ E. Stegmann, pp. 74, 111; T. A. Seidel, ‘Im Wechsel der Systeme...’, pp. 338-339.

³⁵ EZAB, 2/148, Memorandum of the EKD, 21/11/46; see also: J. J. Seidel, ‘Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...’, p. 29; J. J. Seidel, ‘Abkehr vom “Deutschen Christentum”...’, p. 39; C. Koch, p. 239; K. Meier, *Der evangelischen Kirchenkampf*, p. 491; Mitzenheim maintained that Rönck’s assumption of the title of bishop was because ‘he thought in so doing he would have protection from the concentration camp’: EZAB, 2/148, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 6/1/46.

³⁶ EZAB, 2/148, Dr. Werner to Hans Asmussen (EKD), 23/10/45.

³⁷ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 17; cf. only 13.3% of the pastorate were German Christians: *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, ‘Wie steht es um die Thüringer evangelische Kirche?’, Dr. Hertzsch, p. 3; also: H. Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, p. 825.

³⁸ H. Möller, A. O. Tschubarjan (eds.), p. 106 (29 June 1946).

³⁹ EZAB, 2/148, Dr. Werner to Hans Asmussen (EKD), 23/10/45.

⁴⁰ EZAB, 2/148, ‘Bericht’, Mitzenheim, 16/9/45; EZAB, 2/148, Dr. Schanze to Bishop Wurm, 6/6/4; EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 11/47, 30/4/47.

Arnold, Ewald Knöfler and Walter Bischoff.⁴¹ All were dismissed, although Haugk had reportedly criticised Nazism, Knöfler alleged that he was an ‘inactive’ Nazi party member and Laue also ‘had not stressed’ his party membership. The Vice-President of the TeK, Erwin Brauer, and other members of the wartime LKR were also released from their duties.⁴²

The foundation for systematic denazification was the somewhat belated *Reinigungsgesetz* (‘Purification law’) of 12 December 1945.⁴³ The legislation followed ‘The guidelines for the purification of the administration from Nazi elements’ decreed by the Thuringian Minister President, Hermann Brill, on 28 May 1945.⁴⁴ According to the first section of the *Reinigungsgesetz*:

The pastors, officials, staff and workers, who through their political or church-political behaviour have grossly violated the duties of their office and have damaged the Church, are to be in principle dismissed from the service of the Thuringian Evangelical Church.⁴⁵

A special internal church hearing was established to execute the *Reinigungsgesetz* and it comprised four clergy, of whom one was a former member of the Confessing Church and the others were neutrals.⁴⁶ The pastorate was required to fill out questionnaires on involvement in and affiliations to Nazi organisations and some individuals were also

⁴¹ *LKAE*, A 239 III, ‘Niederschrift’, 13/7/45; *LKAE*, A 239 III, 41, ‘Fragebogen’ (Bischoff, Knöfler, Laue et al).

⁴² *LKAE*, A 239 III, 103, Dr. Schanze to Mitzenheim, 13/9/45.

⁴³ *LKAE*, A 155, 59, ‘Die rechtliche Neuordnung der Thüringer evangelische Kirche’, Oberkirchenrat G. Lotz; *LKAE*, A 122 XVI, 102, 2/10/45, 123, 13/11/45, 131-132, 23/11/45, 134, 11/12/45, 139; 158, 17/12/45; for secondary literature see: J. J. Seidel, ‘Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...’, p. 47; J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 425-426; T. A. Seidel, ‘...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart’..., pp. 173, 175; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 203ff.

⁴⁴ See: Manfred Overesch, *Deutschland 1945-1949...*, pp. 182-184.

⁴⁵ *EZAB*, 2/148, 53, ‘Gesetz zur Überprüfung der Pfarrerschaft und der Verwaltung der Thüringer evangelischen Kirche (Reinigungsgesetz). Vom 12 Dezember 1945’; Clemens Vollnhals (ed.), *Entnazifizierung und Selbstreinigung...*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁶ *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Bishop Wurm, 3/1/47.

compelled to supply curriculum vitae.⁴⁷ The final decision in all individual cases involving former German Christians and Nazi activists was reached by the hearing.

In due course, according to Mitzenheim, a ‘great number’ of pastors and other church officials were dismissed from office.⁴⁸ This figure included 22 of the 37 superintendents in addition to 84 pastors.⁴⁹ As early as June 1946, Mitzenheim wrote to the chancellery of the EKD that there were ‘no signs that the German Christians [will] somehow rise again... The German Christian affair can finally be seen as finished’.⁵⁰ The internal church hearing was formally dissolved on 26 May 1948.⁵¹ In all, church evaluations of the denazification process were very positive. Mitzenheim’s own assessment, of course, was that the TeK ‘self-purification’ was an almost unmitigated success. To impressions that this was not so, Mitzenheim passionately responded in another letter to the EKD: ‘The pastorate has been considerably renewed and there is a completely new spirit at work in the Thuringian Evangelical Church. Everything German Christian is cleared out.’⁵² Dr. Schanze also pointed out the relatively quick consolidation of the TeK on a firm foundation, although he never claimed that denazification was thorough, noting instead that such a task was one for the long term and required more ‘tenacious work’.⁵³

In reality, thorough denazification never occurred. Many German Christians remained in office and even Mitzenheim and other members of the LKR did not deny the retention of

⁴⁷ On the questionnaires: *LKAE*, A 122 XVI, 71, 11/9/45; at Duderstadt: Eberling (ed.), pp. 35-40. For an example of a *Lebenslauf*, see: *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen, Ministerium des Innern, 536, 69, *Lebenslauf* Pf. Otto H.

⁴⁸ *LKAE*, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁴⁹ *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, ‘Wie steht es um die Thüringer evangelische Kirche?’, Dr. Hertzsch, p. 3; H. Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, p. 825; on exact numbers and further discussion see: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 256-258.

⁵⁰ *LKAE*, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47; see also: *GuH*, 2/44, 2/11/47, ‘Im Lande Luthers – lutherische Kirche’, Mitzenheim, pp. 1-3.

⁵¹ *LKAE*, A 239/III, ‘Dankesschreiben’, 14/6/48.

⁵² *LKAE*, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁵³ *EZAB*, 2/148, Dr. Schanze to the EKD, 16/6/46.

German Christians in church offices.⁵⁴ For example, according to Mitzenheim in September 1945: ‘The majority of the German Christian pastors have, after appropriate information, undergone a change and are ready to work in evangelical Christian service.’⁵⁵ A report of the Information Office for Thuringia (Amtes für Information des Landes Thüringen) dating from 26 July 1950 observed:

Landesbischof Mitzenheim and his church council did not denazify the pastorate and church administration after 1945...All functionaries of the Nazi party and Nazi organisations, all officers and career soldiers [remain] as pastors and so-called church officials in the service of the church.⁵⁶

While this report may have been a calculated attack by an anti-Church socialist or even a disaffected former church official, it does correctly identify that the majority of German Christian pastors remained in office.⁵⁷ A former German Christian pastor, for instance, gave a ‘secular-nationalistic’ (weltlich-völkische) confirmation with the German Christian formula on 31 March 1946, during which he quoted passages from Nietzsche instead of the bible. The pastor even claimed that he did not realise that this was contrary to church guidelines.⁵⁸ Ultimately, denazification in the Thuringian Church was ‘mild’.⁵⁹

Limited denazification in the Catholic Church

Denazification was not a priority of the Catholic Church in Thuringia or throughout the Soviet zone.⁶⁰ As attested in three reports sent to the Russian authorities from Heiligenstadt, Erfurt and Weimar, no priest in the Thuringian area of the Fulda Diocese

⁵⁴ For example: *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Bishop Wurm, 3/1/47; *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868/213-214, the LKR to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/11/47.

⁵⁵ *EZAB*, 2/148, ‘Bericht’, Mitzenheim, 16/9/45.

⁵⁶ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/868, 26/7/1950.

⁵⁷ See, for example: T. A. Seidel, “‘...in Sturm und Gericht der Gegenwart’...”, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁸ *LKAE*, A 776, 92, Mitzenheim to all Superintendents and church offices, 11/5/46.

⁵⁹ See: J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 426, 429; T. A. Seidel, ‘Paul Dahinten und seine Chronik des Thüringer Pfarrervereins...’, p. 285.

⁶⁰ W. Tischner, p. 23.

had been a member of the Nazi Party.⁶¹ The key question was: ‘Which measures must be taken in order to root out Nazism completely?’ Freusberg responded that, because no priests had been members of the Nazi party, no dismissals were necessary.⁶² There were similar comments in the Heiligenstadt and Weimar reports. Since no clergy were relieved of their pastoral offices, priests who were in the service of the Church during the Nazi era continued in their clerical duties in the immediate post-war period.

That no priest was a former member of the Nazi party did not mean that all clergy opposed Nazism or its worldview. There were indeed some Nazi-like sympathies.⁶³ For example, one parishioner objected to a sermon delivered by his local priest entitled ‘The Jews agitate’. In a letter to the Bishop of Fulda, Johannes Dietz, the man wrote:

I absolutely believe that it is not appropriate, after 12 years of Jewish persecution, to preach hate... I myself have a Jewish mother who is converted [to Catholicism] and was by chance at this church service with my sister. We are the only survivors of a family of over 30 people who fortunately have withstood the concentration camp. Are the eight million Jews who were murdered not yet enough!...This sermon is no individual case. No! In different Erfurt churches...the sermon has become a hidden song of hate against the Jews.⁶⁴

The author claimed to speak on behalf of all surviving Jewish converts to Catholicism and there was an implicit sense that, as a convert, he was treated as a “second class” Catholic. The General Vicariate at Fulda passed the letter on to Freusberg who acknowledged that the vicar in question had indeed dealt with the passion of Jesus Christ. In defence, he wrote: ‘It is naturally impossible to characterise the Jews of the time as particularly considerate. To draw derivations out of it for all Jews is an erroneous

⁶¹ BEA, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the American occupation authorities in Erfurt, 13/6/45; see also: D. van Melis, p. 50; H. Dähn, ‘Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften’, p. 824.

⁶² ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Bericht über die kirchlichen Verhältnisse’, Erfurt, 26/10/45.

⁶³ H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 328.

⁶⁴ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Heinz Golletz (Erfurt) to the BGVF, 28/4/47.

conclusion of the listener.’⁶⁵ The reply is unconvincing. The title, ‘The Jews agitate’, had an anti-Semitic undertone that emphasised the Jews’ role in the death of Jesus Christ and not, to the Catholic worldview, the redemptive aspects of the passion narrative. The salient issue was the seeming irresponsibility of the priest in inflating the role of the Jews in Christ’s crucifixion before a congregation of whom some were even former concentration camp inmates!

A directive from Fulda also specified a ‘cleansing of the church committees’. The church committees played a significant role in the oversight of individual churches and were largely responsible for church life in local towns. Some committees had connections to the Nazi past. In Heiligenstadt, they could be pronounced only ‘reasonably free’ of Nazi links.⁶⁶ Church committees in Weimar and Erfurt also were not completely free of National Socialist influence.⁶⁷ According to the Erfurt report from October 1945:

There are in some church committees still such members, who admittedly [zwar] had been PG [Party members], but on the basis of state requirements will leave their offices. They are able therefore to retain the honorary post of a church committee member. There are no other Nazis in the church committees.⁶⁸

Freusberg was reluctant to purge the former Nazis. They were dismissed from official duties only because of ‘state requirements’, and even then they were retained unofficially in an honorary capacity. In all, during the Nazi era, the Thuringian section of the Fulda diocese was never marked by militant Nazism.⁶⁹ Denazification measures were mere tokenism and former Nazis were de-powered but retained their respected status in the church hierarchy.

⁶⁵ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, Freusberg to the BGVF, 9/6/47.

⁶⁶ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, Streb (Heiligenstadt) to the CDU (Weimar), 24/10/45.

⁶⁷ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Kurze Darstellung des derzeitigen Standes der kath. Kirche in Altthüringen’, Weimar, 26/10/45.

⁶⁸ ACDP, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Bericht über die kirchlichen Verhältnisse’, Erfurt, 26/10/45.

⁶⁹ Particularly in Eichsfeld: E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, p. 18.

Why was there limited denazification in the churches?

There were four major reasons a complete denazification of personnel did not take place in the churches. Firstly, the material conditions, which included poor communications and evidence as well as a shortage of pastors, discouraged comprehensive denazification. The TeK authorities also attempted to exercise Christian forgiveness, but it was, above all, a marked lack of desire amongst the church hierarchy that inhibited attempts to purge the pastorate thoroughly. Lastly, both churches, and the Catholic Church in particular, viewed themselves as victims rather than perpetrators of Nazism.

The difficult post-war conditions, including poor communications and often inadequate evidence, hampered comprehensive denazification.⁷⁰ The LKR and the members of the church hearing had little contact with pastors and their communities. Members of the LKR sought to meet as many pastors as possible as part of their duties and were still doing so by early 1947.⁷¹ In effect, a complete denazification process would have involved imposing 'purification' measures on pastors based largely on poor evidence. Denunciations especially were rife in the post-war period. For example, there was an accusation against the Superintendent of Sonneburg, Gerhard Mälzer, for a letter he authored in 1941 and signed off with 'Heil Hitler'.⁷² Denunciations were not often conclusive and the Church hearing as a rule did not accept them as adequate grounds for dismissal.

Another difficulty of the post-war conditions was the lack of replacements for dismissed pastors.⁷³ The Church lacked suitably able or qualified pastors to replace those few who were dismissed, let alone a much greater number if there had been a more thorough

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 376.

⁷¹ *LKAE*, A 130 II, 'Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht des aufsichtführenden Oberkirchenrates des Bezirkes Mitte über das Jahr 1946', Dr. Schanze, 12/2/47; *LKAE*, A 130 II, Oberkirchenrat Säuberlich (Gera) to the LKR, 1/2/47; *LKAE*, A 130 II, Oberkirchenrat Ziegner (Warza) to the LKR, 28/1/47.

⁷² *LKAE*, A 930 V, 19, Superintendentur Sonneburg to the LKR, 2/8/47.

⁷³ See, in general: J. J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, p. 428; T. A. Seidel, 'Im Wechsel der Systeme...', p. 341.

process of denazification. The TeK suffered from a lack of clergymen and, while it actively recruited in the post-war period, many communities remained without a pastor in 1948.⁷⁴ Still, the increase in churchmen was dramatic: from 362 in 1944 to 794 in mid-1947.⁷⁵ In fact, Mitzenheim noted in his first circular to the pastorate of the TeK in November 1945: ‘The community is better cared for than in the war period.’⁷⁶ Despite this, there was still a shortage of pastors in the order of approximately 150 and many parishes remained vacant.⁷⁷ In Buchenwald there was only one clergyman for the care of approximately 30,000 internees.⁷⁸ A pastor at Jena wrote to Mitzenheim urging him to exercise restraint in denazification in order to be better able to attend to the everyday needs of the ‘seeking’.⁷⁹ His advice, even in relation to former German Christians, recalled Hindenburg: ‘Worry that Christ is proclaimed in Germany, nothing else.’ There was also little mention of the Nazi past in Moritz Mitzenheim’s circulars to the TeK pastorate from 1945 to 1948. The focus of Mitzenheim and the church authorities was the spiritual and material care of evangelical communities.⁸⁰

Forgiveness was primary in the grounds for dismissal from the TeK and it was another reason that denazification was limited in the TeK. According to Mitzenheim, while the most militant German Christians were to be forthwith dismissed from office, pastors who were ‘influenced’ by the erroneous teaching but had turned back to orthodox Lutheranism

⁷⁴ For example, in Schmölln: *GuH*, 1/6, 2/6/46, ‘Thüringer kirchliche Chronik’, p. 3; also see: M. Greschat, ‘Vorgeschichte’, p. 15; J. J. Seidel, ‘Abkehr vom “Deutschen Christentum”...’, p. 42; E. Stegmann, p. 109.

⁷⁵ *LKAE*, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁷⁶ T. Björkman (ed.), p. 22.

⁷⁷ *EZAB*, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 20/47, 15/8/47; see also: *LKAE*, A 130 II, ‘Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht des aufsichtführenden Oberkirchenrates des Bezirkes Mitte über das Jahr 1946’, Dr. Schanze, 12/2/47; *LKAE*, A 130 II, 1945-1953, Oberkirchenrat Säuberlich (Gera) to the LKR, 1/2/47; *LKAE*, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47; *LKAE*, A 616a, Statistik über Kirchenkreise, Kirchengemeinden und Pfarrstellen, 1947; The lack of pastors is, in the main part, explained by the death of churchmen during wartime service while others also remained interned in POW camps after the conflict: C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 17, C. Koch, p. 35; E. Stegmann, p. 109.

⁷⁸ *LKAE*, A 527 II, 29, Superintendentur Weimar to the LKR, 13/2/46.

⁷⁹ *LKAE*, A 239 III, 170, Johannes Rabe to Mitzenheim, 10/12/45.

⁸⁰ See T. Björkman (ed.), pp. 20-42.

were allowed to remain in the Church in an acting capacity.⁸¹ Other German Christians were placed in retirement or probation. Mitzenheim stated that: 'From the outset...forgiveness is the prerequisite for our conduct according to church standards.'⁸² Another senior churchman remarked that after the effects of German Christian teaching had passed, former German Christians would become more receptive to Lutheran theological work.⁸³ The goal was not to pursue revenge but to win back wayward pastors to the Church. Foremost was an attitude of cleaning what was dirty and reusing it.⁸⁴ Forgiveness was paramount in this process. There was intent to turn the majority of German Christian pastors toward orthodox Lutheran teaching of the Christian gospel without pursuing punitive measures.⁸⁵

However, forgiveness was not so wide-ranging that the most visible and militant German Christians were to be retained.⁸⁶ Mitzenheim realised that forgiveness 'does not mean in any way that human empathy spares the German Christians the consequences of their wayward ways...For the sake of maintaining the credibility of the church message it is often impossible to keep [German Christians] in office'.⁸⁷ The majority of German Christians, however, were regarded as responsive to retraining. In this vein of forgiveness and grace, Mitzenheim noted ten years after the end of the war that the process of denazification had proceeded successfully on the 'foundation of justice and compassion'.⁸⁸

However, the primary reason for incomplete denazification in the TeK was a deliberate lack of will amongst the church hierarchy. This absence of resolve is revealed in inconsistencies that dogged church denazification. Mitzenheim's own aversion to

⁸¹ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Entnazifizierung und Selbstreinigung...*, pp. 93-94.

⁸² EZAB, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Bishop Wurm, 3/1/47.

⁸³ LKAE, A 130 II, Pf. Deter to Dr. Schanze, undated (probably late 1945, early 1946).

⁸⁴ LKAE, A 776, 98, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 21/6/47.

⁸⁵ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ LKAE, A 130 II, Pf. Deter to Dr. Schanze, undated (probably late 1945, early 1946).

⁸⁷ EZAB, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Bishop Wurm, 3/1/47.

⁸⁸ M. Mitzenheim, *50 Jahre im Dienste der Kirche...*, p. 92.

dismissing many of his pastors delayed systematic denazification in the Church until early 1946. In fact, within and without the Church, Mitzenheim was accused of avoiding denazification. A pastor from Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Dr. Werner, reported the ‘unbearable’ conditions in Thuringia in the first months after the war: ‘It is astonishing that the most extreme German Christians are still in office and care for communities as “pastors”. Probably only this has changed: that they no longer espouse “Mein Kampf” from the pulpit.’ Mitzenheim did not deny the continued involvement of former German Christians in the TeK in the first months after the war and Dr. Werner maintained that the lack of denazification was due to the men in church leadership. There were hardly the personnel in Thuringia who were able to reform and denazify the Church, and he urged intervention from the EKD in order to avoid personal guilt.⁸⁹ Even within the LKR, Mitzenheim was accused of a lack of will to execute denazification. According to a letter from Dr. Wolfgang Schanze to Mitzenheim dated 16 May 1945: ‘It seems as if you do not in any way intend to draw conclusions from the political collapse of the [Thuringian] German Christians.’⁹⁰ Walter Zimmermann agreed with Schanze on the necessity of immediate denazification.⁹¹ Still, denazification was delayed until the end of 1945.

Even after the *Reinigungsgesetz* of December 1945, there were contradictions in Mitzenheim’s position which showed his lack of desire to practice a more thorough process of denazification. Publicly Mitzenheim emphasised the importance of denazification within the Church and he pointed to the compromised position of former German Christians. On the other hand, for instance, he interceded on behalf of Dr. Leopold Biehl – a church elder and former German Christian – who was tried in early/mid 1947 in Darmstadt. Biehl’s affiliation to the Eisenach German Christians, according to Mitzenheim, was not enough to impeach him:

There were German Christian preachers of many impressions and emphases in Thuringia and also in Eisenach. If one community member joined the German Christians, it cannot be concluded from this that one participated in and went

⁸⁹ EZAB, 2/148, Dr. Werner to Hans Asmussen, 23/10/45.

⁹⁰ LKAE, A 130 II, Dr. Schanze to Mitzenheim, 16/5/45.

⁹¹ LKAE, A 130 II, Walter Zimmermann to Dr. Schanze, 18/5/45.

along with the radical faction, rather, the membership of the German Christians was often only the expression for a certain church interest that, admittedly, was often unknown and misguided.⁹²

Mitzenheim also noted that Biehl was heavily involved in church life during the war and was never in the foreground of the German Christian/Confessing Church conflict.⁹³ Allegiance to the German Christians was not, in the eyes of Mitzenheim, damning and he was prepared to intercede for at least one former German Christian who was a personal friend. Mitzenheim lacked the resolve to carry out thorough denazification, especially when a friendship was at stake.

The lack of will amongst the TeK hierarchy, and Mitzenheim in particular, was primarily based on the realisation that a more thorough process of denazification would have significantly weakened the Church. This instability would have been revealed not only in regard to the number of pastors and the presence of the Church amongst believers, but, most importantly, *vis-à-vis* the Russians and the state authorities. Not only in the TeK but throughout all the churches in the zones, there was intent to protect one's own.⁹⁴ From the end of the war, Mitzenheim's treatment of the denazification question reflected the contours of his future 'Thüringer Weg' (Thuringian Path) during the GDR dictatorship.⁹⁵ Mitzenheim was, above all, conscious of creating a 'living space' for the Church at any cost – even if it meant tolerating former German Christians in office. The tenacity shown by Mitzenheim and the TeK hierarchy to preserve the church's autonomy is best evidenced by their responses to the critical *Abendpost* article when no less than three members of the LKR responded with letters to the *Abendpost* editors, the EKD and the office of the Thuringian Minister President.

⁹² LKAE, A 193 III, Mitzenheim to the chairman of the Darmstadt hearing, 24/6/47.

⁹³ Ibid.; see also: LKAE, A 193 III, Dr. Biehl to Mitzenheim, 8/2/48.

⁹⁴ C. Vollnhals, 'Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung', pp. 142-143.

⁹⁵ On Mitzenheim's 'Thüringer Weg' and relationship with the GDR authorities see: J. J. Seidel, 'Moritz Mitzenheim – Bischof und Landesvater', *Lutherische Kirche in der Welt*, 32, (1985), pp. 74-81; Gerhard Besier, 'Aus der Resistenz in der Kooperation. Der "Thüringer Weg" zur "Kirche im Sozialismus"', in: *Kirchen in der Diktatur. Drittes Reich und SED-Staat*, eds. G. Heydemann, L. Kettenaker, (Göttingen: 1993), pp. 182-212.

Finally, both churches stressed their ‘resistance’ to Nazism that precluded a thorough process of denazification. Mitzenheim emphasised the role of the Church in warning and protecting the community from the encroachments of Nazism.⁹⁶ It was the Catholic Church, however, that above all asserted that it was a victim of Nazism rather than a perpetrator.⁹⁷ The Church considered the exigencies of the present more pressing than the crimes of the Nazi past, which were, in its view, exterior to it.

In order to understand the Church’s conception of its victimisation by Nazism, it is necessary to trace the outlines of relations between the Catholic Church and the National Socialist State. On 20 July 1933, the papacy concluded a Concordat with the Nazi government. Hitler guaranteed the freedom of religion in pastoral care and religious instruction, and the toleration of Catholic groups and unions. In return, the clergy agreed to stay out of politics.⁹⁸ The bishop of Berlin, Cardinal Konrad Graf von Preysing, saw the agreement as an assurance that the Nazi party was to a degree ‘Christian’, while the papacy viewed the Concordat of 1933 as an opportunity to protect German Catholicism.⁹⁹ There was not, in reality, a peaceful co-existence between Church and State. The Catholic press and other organisations were suppressed while Nazi anti-Catholic propaganda was prevalent, particularly between 1934 and 1939. In Eichsfeld, a number of priests were arrested and imprisoned for various forms of opposition to the State. These included the priests Gustav Vogt and Johannes Albrecht who were murdered in Dachau and Berlin respectively.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundsreiben, 31/12/45, see also: J.J. Seidel, *Aus den Trümmern 1945...*, pp. 375-376.

⁹⁷ See, in general: D. van Melis, pp. 66-67; K. Repgen, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Bernhard Opfermann, *Das Bistum Fulda im Dritten Reich*, (Fulda: 1987), p. 6; on the Concordat in general see: Günter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, (London: 1964), pp. 57-93; Ernst C. Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler. Background, struggle, and epilogue*, (Detroit: 1979), pp. 237-256.

⁹⁹ Konrad Graf von Preysing, *Hirtenworte in ernster Zeit. Kundgebungen des Bischofs von Berlin Konrad Kardinal von Preysing in den Jahren 1945-47*, (Berlin: 1947), p. 5; *Fulda Amtsblatt*, 64/2, ‘Hl. Vater über die Haltung der deutschen Katholiken in den Jahren 1933-1945’, 20/1/48.

¹⁰⁰ G. Lautenschläger, p. 480; B. Opfermann, *Das Bistum Fulda im Dritten Reich*, pp. 15-18, 82-83.

Due to conflicts between the government and the Catholic Church, the Church viewed itself as a victim of National Socialism. Three reports submitted by Catholic authorities in Thuringia to the SMATh in October 1945 commented on the Catholic experience during the Nazi era.¹⁰¹ Religious life in general was much impeded and, for many church organisations, prohibitions were the order of the day.¹⁰² Confessional schools were closed, services and sermons were supervised and festivals were restricted or banned. Catholic media was also proscribed.¹⁰³ Due to persecution and the appeal of National Socialism, many apostatised and left the Church. Other Catholics bore the persecution silently while a minority resisted Nazism – such as the Jesuit priest Alfred Delp.¹⁰⁴ A papal statement published in the *Fulda Amtsblatt* retrospectively emphasised that the widespread silent endurance of Nazi persecution had been the best defence of the Church at large.¹⁰⁵

The Catholic Church also elected to remember believers who were victims of persecution.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, the Church established heroism amidst repression as the memory of the Nazi past for posterity. In 1947, a day (14 September) was set aside for ‘Victims of Fascism’ when prayers were offered for those who died under National Socialist tyranny.¹⁰⁷ The Church adopted martyrs for people to revere. One was the priest Ludwig Jacquet who was evacuated from the Metz diocese to Scheibe-Alsbach in

¹⁰¹ *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, Josef Streb (Heiligenstadt) to the CDU (Weimar), 24/10/45; *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Bericht über die kirchlichen Verhältnisse’, Freusberg, 26/10/45; *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Kurze Darstellung des derzeitigen Standes der kath. Kirche in Altthüringen’, Weimar, 26/10/45.

¹⁰² *ACDP*, Landesverband Thüringen 03-031-243, ‘Kurze Darstellung des derzeitigen Standes der kath. Kirche in Altthüringen’, Weimar, 26/10/45.

¹⁰³ *BEA*, CII a16, SMA Thüringen, 1945-1953, Freusberg to the American occupation authorities, 2/6/45.

¹⁰⁴ See, in general: Mary F. Coady (ed.), *With bound hands: a Jesuit in Nazi Germany. The life and selected prison letters of Alfred Delp*, (Chicago: 2003).

¹⁰⁵ *Fulda Amtsblatt*, 64/2, ‘Hl. Vater über die Haltung der deutschen Katholiken in den Jahren 1933-1945’, 20/1/48; see also: K. Repgen, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶ For example: K. von Preysing, pp. 25-26, 36.

¹⁰⁷ *BEA*, 3 III, Erfurt, St. Marien, Propststeipfarrkirche, 1942-1959, Gottesdienst und Seelsorge, 14/9/47.

Thuringia and subsequently died in Buchenwald.¹⁰⁸ There, in the report of an eyewitness, he continued his priestly duties despite personal sufferings. On 31 March 1945, Jacquet was shot trying to escape during a bombing raid on Weimar. For the post-war Catholic Church, and for the Rudolstadt community in particular, Jacquet's behaviour while incarcerated represented an unwavering commitment to his faith: he was a role-model to follow and his conduct was an example to honour.

The position of the church authorities in viewing the Church as a victim of fascism meant that Catholic individuals could not have been Nazi collaborators because they were, first and foremost, Catholics. For example, Freusberg sought the release of eight Catholic teachers who had been former SS men. Freusberg argued in a letter to the Thuringian Minister President, Dr. Rudolf Paul, that, although 'membership in the SS is an extremely ugly blemish', the accused were 'convinced Catholics and, *as such*, already anti-fascists'.¹⁰⁹ Freusberg asserted that the eight were active in the Church and refused to enter the Nazi party or its affiliated organisations until 1938 after which their continued church observance 'was a frank opposition to Nazism'.¹¹⁰ Freusberg's intercession reflected the common church self-perception towards Nazism: because the eight were Catholics, they could not possibly have been enthusiastic Nazis.

Conclusion

The lack of state intervention in the churches' processes of denazification underscored their privileged post-war position. This position, as shown in chapter two, was unprecedented and it offered a great opportunity for the churches to put their houses in order. Neither did so. The conduct of the Catholic Church in Thuringia was consistent with the greater Catholic Church in Germany and not one priest was dismissed from

¹⁰⁸ BEA, BGVP bzw. Fulda, 'Bericht der Pfarrchronik der Diaspora-Gemeinde über die Leiden des H.H. Pfarrers Ludwig Jacquet. 1944-1946', Rudolstadt to the BGVP, 10/1/46.

¹⁰⁹ ThHStAW, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/866/38, Freusberg to the Thuringian Minister President, 6/7/46 (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.; see also: ThHStAW, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/866/38, Präsidialamt to Schulrat Linde (Kreisbildungsamt, Eisenach), 26/7/46.

service throughout the SBZ.¹¹¹ This was because no priest was a member of the Nazi party. However, there were some Nazi sympathisers and the lack of denazification may be primarily attributed to the Church's self-conception as a victim of Nazism rather than a perpetrator.

The Protestant Church, on the other hand, faced greater problems in the form of 'politically compromised' officials and pastors from the Nazi era. The TeK was no isolated case and everywhere in the SBZ the 'cleansing process' was marked by significant conflicts. A compromised pastorate also created issues for the denazification proceedings in Anhalt and Saxony and they were not finished until 1950 and December 1951 respectively.¹¹² Although the material circumstances of the post-war period and the exercise of Christian forgiveness hindered thorough denazification, it was, above all, Mitzenheim's lack of will that ensured that a comprehensive 'purification' process did not occur. Mitzenheim was conscious of presenting a front of effective denazification to the authorities whilst lacking the will to effect such a process in reality. The key consideration of Mitzenheim was the necessity of creating a space and life for the Church apart from the jurisdiction of secular authorities despite the compromises this entailed. In this, Mitzenheim trod the *Thüringer Weg*.

The lack of political consequences for limited denazification in the TeK especially was staggering. It was one thing that the SMATh pursued no punitive measures for keeping German Christians in office, some of whom even persisted with German Christian practices, but quite another that in doing so the autonomous 'living space' of the TeK was vouchsafed. This is startling in comparison to the vigorous and often brutal Russian denazification policy throughout the Soviet zone, including Thuringia.¹¹³ In effect, the TeK existed in its own 'bubble' in which formerly pro-fascist elements worked and did so with full public knowledge. It is evident that, regarding the Nazi past and

¹¹¹ W. Tischner, p. 23.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 405, p. 396.

¹¹³ L. Kettenacker, pp. 18-19; M. Dennis, p. 18.

denazification, the Catholic Church and the TeK both had the freedom to impose their authority upon and influence the wider Christian population.

7: Church conceptions of guilt and community attitudes to the Nazi past

We [the German Church] have struggled throughout long years in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit that found fearful expression in nationalistic tyranny; but we lament that we were not more courageous, had prayed more faithfully, believed more joyfully and loved more passionately.¹

This statement stems from the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt (Stuttgarter Schuldbekentnis) offered by the Evangelical Church in Germany in October 1945. Moritz Mitzenheim, on behalf of the TeK, accepted the Confession, yet he never offered a specific declaration of guilt that admitted the particular failings of the Thuringian pastorate. Thuringian German Christians, after all, were regarded as among the most radical supporters of Nazism. The TeK did, nevertheless, attempt to influence faith communities at large to assume some responsibility for National Socialism. Despite this, in Thuringia and throughout Germany, the population for the most part failed to acknowledge any guilt for Nazism and very few wanted to dwell on the past.² One observer reported that, 'Of Nazism astonishingly little is spoken'.³ This general atmosphere is shown in the results of surveys for the Office of Military Government of the United States (OMGUS). The surveys measured trends in German public opinion and attitudes to Nazism in the post-war period.⁴ For instance, from 27 December 1945 until 8

¹ Gerhard Besier, Gerhard Sauter (eds.), *Wie Christen ihre Schuld bekennen. Die Stuttgarter Erklärung 1945*, (Göttingen: 1985), p. 62; see also: Fritz Söhlmann (ed.), *Treysa 1945*, (Lüneberg: 1946), p. 89; Günter Heidtmann (ed.), *Hat die Kirche geschwiegen? Das öffentliche Wort der evangelischen Kirche aus den Jahren 1945-1964*, 3rd Edition, (Berlin [West]: 1964), pp. 19-20.

² C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, p. 37ff; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 326; Georg Denzler, Volker Fabricius, *Christen und Nationalsozialisten. Darstellung und Dokumente*, (Frankfurt am Main: 1993), p. 228.

³ C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 11.

⁴ The surveys ran from 26 October 1945 up until the foundation of the *Bundesrepublik* in 1949: Erwin K. Scheuch, 'Der Umbruch nach 1945 im Spiegel der Umfragen', in: *Gesellschaftlicher Umbruch 1945-1990. Re-Demokratisierung und Lebensverhältnisse*, eds. U. Gerhardt, E. Mochmann, (Munich: 1992), pp. 9-25.

January 1949 a consistent majority maintained that Nazism was a good idea carried out badly, rather than an inherently bad idea.⁵ Over 70 percent of the German population in the American zone believed that Nazism was corrupted by its leadership and that Hitler was responsible for German atrocities. In six surveys from 1 November 1945 until 5 January 1948, an overwhelming percentage of Germans also did not accept the idea of collective guilt.⁶ Even by the 1950s, this attitude continued and there was a desire to put an end to the ‘unpleasant’ matter.⁷

In this chapter, I will pose two questions. Why did the TeK fail to make its own general confession of guilt? Why did the community not respond to church calls to repentance? The purpose of the chapter is to show that, although it attempted to change popular attitudes, the Church was ultimately unable to influence the population at large to feel any personal guilt. As for the Catholic Church, there was little discussion of the Nazi past at all. Neither the Catholic authorities nor the community at large expressed any guilt; the Church was, after all, a victim of Nazism.

No collective guilt in the TeK

The most common Protestant view of the German collapse was to see it as God’s judgement on a wayward people.⁸ Dr. Hertzsch, one of the members of the LKR, wrote in *Glaube und Heimat* that, although the German people possessed a great Christian legacy, it had been allowed to go to ruin.⁹ Hertzsch referred to the period of Nazi government as an intensification of the falling away from Christ that had its origins in the

⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 17-19.

⁷ Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*, 2nd Edition, (Munich: 1997), see especially his conclusion: pp. 397-406.

⁸ See, for instance: *GuH*, 1/5, 26/5/46, ‘Vergebung – Einigkeit – Bruderschaft’, p. 1; *GuH*, 2/46, 16/11/47, ‘Ewigkeit in die Zeit’, Kramer (Fröttstadt), p. 1; M. Greschat, ‘Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung...’, pp. 110-111.

⁹ *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, ‘Eines der unchristlichen Völker Europas’, Dr. Hertzsch, p. 1.

beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰ The result was defeat through God's judgement. One circular from the Treysa conference of evangelical churches in Germany in August 1945 began: 'God's court of wrath has broken upon us.'¹¹ Mitzenheim viewed the situation in post-war Thuringia in a similar way. While the difficult environment was not explicitly referred to as God's judgement, it was the result of an 'error' that had led to the severance of the connection to the 'central power source'. The separation from God, according to Mitzenheim, was the result of arrogance and a belief that people could 'solve the questions of life' apart from God.¹²

Despite this 'straying from God', Mitzenheim did not confess to a collective church guilt. The TeK never admitted any responsibility for the particular radicalism of Thuringian German Christians and their close affinity with National Socialist ideology. There were three ways the Church avoided making a declaration of guilt. Firstly, the TeK hid behind the collective responsibility of the Stuttgart Confession. Secondly, it chose, like the Catholic Church, to glorify the minority who resisted Nazism. Lastly and most importantly, the absence of a confession protected the Church from the possibility of state intervention.

One stratagem the TeK used to avoid recognising its own particular guilt was to acknowledge the existence of a collective responsibility that was shared by all evangelical churches in Germany. The question of guilt was an extremely contentious issue that faced the entire post-war German Protestant Church.¹³ Mitzenheim himself accepted, albeit belatedly, the Stuttgart Confession which was offered on behalf of the German evangelical churches. As a result of considerable dispute, however, the content

¹⁰ Cf. *GuH*, 1/12, 14/7/46, 'Einzig Hoffnung', Superintendent Bauer (Stadtroda), p. 1.

¹¹ F. Söhlmann (ed.), p. 87.

¹² *GuH*, 1/1, 21/4/46, 'Mutter Kirche', Mitzenheim, p. 1.

¹³ C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, p. 33ff; K. Meier, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf*, pp. 583-586; in general, see: Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, 'Mitverantwortung und Schuld der Christen am Holocaust', in: *Christlicher Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus. Theologische und kirchliche Programme Deutscher Christen*, ed. L. Siegele-Wenschkewitz, (Frankfurt/Main: 1994), pp. 1-26; Georg Kretschmar, 'Die Vergangenheitsbewältigung in den deutschen Kirchen nach 1945', in: *Nordische und deutsche Kirchen im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. C. Nicolaisen, (Göttingen: 1982), pp. 122-149.

of the declaration was ultimately a compromise.¹⁴ In fact, due to an ostensible contradiction in the Confession, that the German Evangelical Church had struggled against Nazism and, yet, was still guilty due to significant ‘failings’, interpretations were vastly dissimilar. Different parties within the Church alleged that either the Confession did not make a clear enough declaration of guilt, or that it was too much too forward in its admission of culpability. A specific acknowledgement of responsibility for crimes against the Jews was also omitted.¹⁵

On the Confession’s twenty-fifth anniversary, Mitzenheim praised the ‘courage’ and ‘long-sightedness’ of the men involved drawing up the document:

Their declaration was an act, a first bridge from Church to Church, from people to people in a stormy time over still raging waters. They hoped that the forgiven guilt would become a motor to a new life.¹⁶

At the time of the Confession, however, Mitzenheim did not dwell at all on any conceptions of a compromised church. Denazification from the outset, as shown, was hesitant and was not formalised until the enactment of the *Reinigungsgesetz* in December 1945. In any case, Mitzenheim’s acceptance of the Confession did not impugn the TeK with any specific guilt. Instead, the TeK was just one of the German churches that could have done ‘more’. The closest Mitzenheim came to an admission of church guilt in the period 1945 to 1948 was contained his address to all congregations in the TeK on 31 December 1945. He expressed that the pastorate of the TeK had often lacked love and

¹⁴ On the Stuttgart Confession see, for example: Peter Bucher (ed.), pp. 72-73; M. Greschat, ‘Vorgeschichte’, pp. 22-27; C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, p. 33ff; C. Vollnhals, ‘Die evangelische Kirche zwischen Traditionswahrung und Neuorientierung’, pp. 130-136; *KJ*, 1945-1948, pp. 19-27; K. Herbert, pp. 25-27; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 326; Josef Schmid, ‘Verdrängungen, Instrumentisierungen und einzelne Einsichten: Die frühe Schulddebatte’, in: *Der Neubeginn. Deutschland zwischen 1945 und 1949*, p. 146ff; Martin Lotz, *Evangelische Kirche 1945-1952*, (Stuttgart: 1992), pp. 35-49; Gerhard Besier, *Die evangelische Kirche in den Umbrüchen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: 1994), pp. 3, 9-11, for further literature: p. 3 (n.1). Conflict also surrounded the ‘Darmstadt edict’ of 8 August 1947: K. Meier, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf*, p. 586.

¹⁵ C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, p. 35; see also: G. Denzler, V. Fabricius (eds.), p. 228; J. Schmid, p. 149.

¹⁶ Moritz Mitzenheim, *Aus Christlicher Verantwortung: Beiträge zu eine humanistische politische Diakone*, (Berlin: 1971), p. 118.

faithfulness in the Christian sense under Nazi government.¹⁷ The responsibility therefore lay only with certain people who simply did not do ‘enough’. The implication was that if only *individuals* had done that one bit more, loved more or were more faithful, the crimes of the Nazi government could have been thwarted or averted.

Secondly, Mitzenheim did not offer a church confession of guilt as he chose to emphasise the acts of a minority who opposed or resisted National Socialism rather than focusing on the majority who tolerated or accommodated Nazi ideology. In particular, Mitzenheim sidestepped any responsibility for Nazism and the particular radicalism of the Thuringian German Christians. Instead, the role of the Church was one of protection and warning against National Socialism.¹⁸ Like the Catholic Church, the TeK sought to remember the actions of those who opposed tyranny, and, in some cases, were martyred in their struggle.¹⁹ In one article published in *Glaube und Heimat* a year after the reconstitution of the TeK, Mitzenheim wrote in hagiographical style:

Firstly, our church thanks God for His help to Thuringian pastors and community members who in the past 12 years have unshakably risked their position like, above all, our unforgettable Ernst Otto; their personal freedom, like the many who were imprisoned; and, like Werner Sylten who died in the concentration camp, gave their lives for the gospel in order that this goal [the reestablishment of the TeK on the fundamentals of bible and confession] might be attained.²⁰

In the same edition of *Glaube und Heimat* appeared an article on the life of the Berlin pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was executed at Flossenburg concentration camp just

¹⁷ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 31/12/45; see also: J. J. Seidel, ‘Die evangelische Kirche in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands...’, pp. 47-48; T. A. Seidel, ‘Erblast und Erneuerungsversuche...’, p. 92.

¹⁸ EZAB, 2/149, Sammelrundschreiben, 31/12/45.

¹⁹ See, for example: F. Söhlmann (ed.), pp. 87-88; GuH, 2/8, 23/2/47, ‘Pf. Ernst Otto zum Gedächtnis’, Sup. Bauer (Stadtroda), p. 3.

²⁰ GuH, 1/2, 5/5/46, ‘Vor einem Jahr’, Mitzenheim, p. 1; on Ernst Otto see: Waldemar Wucher (ed.), *Die Spur führt durch Thüringen. Christus in Leben, Wirken und Denken der Zeiten*, (Berlin: 1959), pp. 146-152.

days before its liberation by Allied soldiers.²¹ This article too, as indicated by the title ('How Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a blood-witness to Christ'), engaged in an idealisation of one individual who had resisted National Socialism. Another man singled out was the concentration camp inmate and pastor Paul Schneider who became known as the 'preacher of Buchenwald' until his death on 18 July 1939.²²

Lastly, there was never a collective confession of guilt as it would have had enormous repercussions for the church policy of 'mild' denazification. The process of 'self-purification' would have likely been confirmed as inadequate and state intervention in the TeK's self-denazification process was a distinct possibility. The church authorities' several vigorous rebuttals of a critical article in the *Abendpost* reflected the extent of the LKR's efforts in avoiding state intervention in the Church.²³ The paramount consideration was that the Church remained autonomous from the State. Mitzenheim, as a result, was careful not to interfere in politics. His '*Thüringer Weg*' attempted to create a 'living space' for the TeK that was independent from the State.²⁴ A confession of guilt simply endangered the freedom of the Church. Attempting not to alienate the SMATh, Mitzenheim focussed on the present – the TeK was starting afresh – and therefore the past was left behind and dealt with in a summary fashion. If he could get away with a 'mild' process of denazification and no general confession of guilt, so much the better; after all, both were historic issues.

Guilt amongst some sections of the elite

Although there was no general confession of guilt, a number of church leaders and elites acknowledged a burden of responsibility and attempted to influence parishioners and the

²¹ *GuH*, 1/2, 5/5/46, 'Wie Dietrich Bonhoeffer ein Blutzeuge Christi wurde', Kehrl, p. 2.

²² W. Wucher, pp. 136-145.

²³ *EZAB*, 2/148, Dr. Stiegel to the *Abendpost* editors, 6/46; *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to the EKD, 4/6/46; *EZAB*, 2/148, Mitzenheim to Präsidialdirektor Staas, 6/46.

²⁴ G. Besier, 'Aus der Resistenz in der Kooperation...', p. 182ff.

German population at large to accept it.²⁵ According to a letter from the church at Altenburg: ‘The Church confesses to the collective guilt of our people!...We warned too little and remained much too silent.’²⁶ Another pastor bitterly lamented that he did not act when the opportunity was there to do so, and he implicated the wider community and the church authorities in his confession of guilt.²⁷ Another article in *Glaube und Heimat* asserted that all Germans were complicit with the Nazi State to some degree:

The Lord will ask once of all of us: did you visit me as I languished as a “communist” or as an “alternate-thinker” in the prisons of the Third Reich and behind the barbed wire of the concentration camps? Did you not (if your [lack of] courage once made you sick) content yourself just with a pious short prayer for me, the imprisoned and interned Christ, and send me [in captivity] at least, for example, a small packet of cigarettes, partaking in my suffering and not heeding defamatory danger with the Gestapo? What you have not done for the least of my brothers, you have not done for me.²⁸

Such was the guilt that some felt the Church had no future without penitence. This idea was not restricted to the TeK. According to one pastor, Martin Niemöller (in an article published in *Glaube und Heimat*), there was undeniably ‘an entire mountain of sin and guilt’ before the German people. The only answer for Niemöller was a return to God.²⁹ Another author wrote that German guilt was collective and ‘could not be washed away by the Rhein’.³⁰

²⁵ For example: *GuH*, 1/14, 28/7/46, ‘Ewigkeit in die Zeit, Der Einzelne’, Elle (Jena), p. 1; *GuH*, 2/3, 26/1/47, ‘Zur Problematik der Schuldfrage’, G. Bäumer, p. 2; *GuH*, 2/13, 30/3/47, ‘Das Kreuz Christi und unsere Schuld’, G. Säuberlich, p. 1; *GuH*, 2/46, 16/11/47, ‘Ewigkeit in die Zeit’, Kramer (Fröttstadt), p. 1.

²⁶ *GuH*, 1/34, 15/12/46, ‘Kirche, bekenne!’, p. 2; see also: *GuH*, 3/31, 1/8/48, ‘Kirche und Judenfrage. Erwägungen zum 10. Sonntag nach Trinitatis. Gedächtnis der Zerstörung Jerusalems’, H. Niederstraße, p. 2.

²⁷ *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, ‘Ein Wort an den jungen Mann’, p. 2.

²⁸ Carl Klinkhammer, ‘Die deutschen Katholiken und die Schuldfrage’, *Neues Abendland*, 1, (1946), pp. 12-16 in: P. Bucher (ed.), p. 219.

²⁹ *GuH*, 1/7, 9/6/46, ‘Tut Buße’, M. Niemöller, p. 2; see also: *GuH*, 1/5, 26/5/46, ‘Vergebung – Einigkeit – Bruderschaft’, p. 1; C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, pp. 30-31, 40-41; K. Meier, *Der evangelischen Kirchenkampf*, p. 582; M. Greschat, ‘Zwischen Aufbruch und Beharrung...’, p. 117; *KJ*, 1945-1948, pp. 29-42.

³⁰ *GuH*, 1/11, 7/7/46, ‘Besinnung über die kirchliche Lage’, Dr. Hanns Lilje (Hannover), p. 1.

Other elites also confessed to a level of Christian responsibility for the past. A parishioner, Dr. Hiss, wrote in the *Glaube und Heimat* column *Hier spricht die Gemeinde*:

If we ask God about guilt for this war, we must, out of a conscience in turmoil – which so many Christians today still seek to answer, rise to the recognition of grace that alone, through God's goodness, gives the answer...by removing guilt and sin.³¹

Given these ideas of culpability, it seems that there were different opinions amongst the TeK church authorities on the question of guilt. However, this impression is an illusion. The apparent tension concerns the person of Mitzenheim. Although Mitzenheim wrote relatively regularly in *Glaube und Heimat* throughout the period 1946 to 1948, at no stage did he broach the topic of church or personal guilt in the newspaper. His only reference to church responsibility was that the pastorate had at times lacked love and faith. On the other hand, many other pastors and church officials discussed guilt in *Glaube und Heimat* frequently. The newspaper, it must be noted, was commissioned by the LKR. In an article entitled *Die Schuldfrage* (The question of guilt), for instance, one pastor was forthcoming in admitting not only his own guilt but he urged other Christians to do likewise and seek God's forgiveness. He wrote: 'The question of guilt has become a agonising question of the current day... We are tormented today by the burden...'.³² This seeming incongruity amongst the church leadership on the issue of guilt may be explained by Mitzenheim's position as the head of the TeK. It is no surprise that he had to be more circumspect in his articles and comments than other church officials. Mitzenheim's silence on the issue of church guilt was simply expedient. He chose, after all, to emphasise the positive aspects of church resistance to Nazism as he sought to ensure the independence of the Church. It is improbable that Mitzenheim would have allowed the church leadership to be divided over the salient issue of guilt as the post-war TeK reformed itself.

³¹ *GuH*, 1/33, 8/12/46, 'Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Heimkehrer und Kirche', Dr. Albert Hiss, p. 2.

³² *GuH*, 1/8, 16/6/46, 'Die Schuldfrage', P. (Altenburg), pp. 1-2.

In all, the church authorities were more than willing to print articles in *Glaube und Heimat* that urged the community to accept their own *personal* guilt and repent of it. In these articles, the TeK leadership attempted to influence the population to accept the Christian redemptive process of transgression, guilt, forgiveness and repentance. On the other hand, the Thuringian Church denied it had any *corporate* responsibility. It is also interesting that the TeK impressed ideas of guilt upon common people given that most other evangelical churches in Germany elected not to discuss ideas of guilt, and the Stuttgart Confession in particular, with individual communities.³³

As for the Catholic Church, apart from the Fulda *Hirtenbrief* of 23 August 1945, which was written on behalf of the German bishops at their first post-war conference, there was no discussion at all of Catholic guilt in post-war Germany.³⁴ Even then, the *Hirtenbrief* differentiated between the guilty and the innocent and was, in no form, an admission of Catholic collective guilt.³⁵ The Pope also never demanded a full confession.³⁶ Within the Catholic Church in Thuringia there was no discussion of culpability because, as shown, the Church viewed itself as a victim of Nazism.³⁷

The lack of guilt in the community

Throughout Germany, individual communities refused to accept any responsibility for National Socialism. This was particularly evident in responses to the Stuttgart Confession in October 1945. Widespread accusations included claims that the Confession did not mention the guilt of the victors and that the Protestant Church had no right to speak for all Germans.³⁸ There was a popular rejection of guilt throughout Germany. Most regional churches elected only to show the Confession to clergy. Calls to repentance went

³³ C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, p. 38.

³⁴ W. Tischner, p. 23; K. Repgen, pp. 132-133; H. Glaser, 1945. *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, pp. 326, 328-329; J. Schmid, pp. 146-147.

³⁵ The text of the *Hirtenbrief* is given in K. Repgen, pp. 161-162, commentary: pp. 148-152.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136; J. Schmid, pp. 146-147.

³⁸ J. Schmid, p. 149.

unheeded in Eutin, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg.³⁹ There was a similar lack of understanding of the question of guilt amongst individual Catholics. The Pope, Pius XII, observed for example: ‘Everyone, whether guilty or innocent, points to his alibi...everyone has his alibi, his excuse on hand.’⁴⁰

The same was also true in Thuringia. In very few instances did people accept ideas of their own guilt. An uncommon example was Wolfgang Eichler, who was a political prisoner interned by the Russians at Buchenwald after the war and he confessed:

It became terribly clear to me that I also was not innocent, even if I had not been active for National Socialism, even if I had attempted in [my] personal area of influence to prevent injustice; for I was silent although I had seen much more than many others.⁴¹

On the whole, faith communities largely ignored elite confessions of guilt. A comment made by the judges of a poetry competition in *Glaube und Heimat* lamented that there was ‘scarcely a poem on regret and guilt’.⁴² Another author noted a lack of conscience amongst the population.⁴³ This atmosphere was further affirmed in the remark of a member of the intelligentsia in Thuringia:

Countless live today in Germany with the opinion that they are not at fault for the dreadfully harsh fate that has now befallen them. They do not want to deny that German guilt may exist, but they defend themselves with passionate outrage against [the idea] that they are responsible for other people’s guilt and should suffer for other people’s guilt.⁴⁴

Although people were reluctant to contemplate their own guilt, some were willing to use the Nazi past as a weapon against other church members. For example, the community at

³⁹ C. Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung...*, pp. 37-38; L. Kettenacker, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Carl Klinkhammer, ‘Die deutschen Katholiken und die Schuldfrage’, *Neues Abendland*, 1, (1946), pp. 12-16 in: P. Bucher (ed.), p. 215; K. Repgen, p. 155ff.

⁴¹ W. Eichler, p. 7.

⁴² *GuH*, 3/19-20, 16/5/48, ‘Zu unserem Preisausschreiben’, Pf. Waldmann, p. 4.

⁴³ *GuH*, 2/17, 27/4/47, ‘Gott verloren – auch den Menschen verloren’, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *GuH*, 2/33, 17/8/47, ‘Versöhnung und Vergebung’, Prof. Dr. H. Schuster, p. 1.

Bendeleben objected to the continued involvement of their local pastor on account of his Nazi past: 'It is for us anti-fascists unbearable to listen to any of this man's addresses and talks from the pulpit.' The pastor had allegedly made 'fanatical' attempts to join the Nazi party (only to be turned away on account of his pastoral office), and had volunteered for war service. His wife had been a member of the Nazi party, the 'right hand' of the local Nazi party boss and she had insisted on the loud and timely recital of 'Heil Hitler'.⁴⁵ Objections against politically compromised church officials were sometimes predicated less on a feeling of guilt based on moral imperatives, but rather on a socialist anti-fascism and/or, at Bendeleben perhaps, a personal vendetta.

There are four possible reasons why faith communities and the Thuringian population in general did not accept church ideas of guilt. Firstly, at a local level the TeK contradicted calls to repentance by interceding for former Nazis. Secondly, people chose to blame only the most visible Nazis and instead viewed themselves as innocent. Thirdly, people were often unable to look past their own situation of deprivation. Finally, Lutz Niethammer's study of denazification in Bavaria offers an interesting psychological paradigm that may be applied to the Thuringian population.⁴⁶

At the local level, the churches undermined their own authority in calling parishioners to repentance and to feelings of guilt. Initially, it is unlikely that the process of incomplete denazification and the absence of an official church confession of guilt hindered the community itself from expressing guilt. Whilst Mitzenheim's half-hearted expression of individual failings was not binding upon all and was eminently avoidable, there was no guarantee that even if the TeK had attempted to go further and more forcefully impress personal collective guilt upon the population they would have been more responsive. In fact, this is highly improbable. Instead, at the community level, it was largely church intercessions for former Nazis in Protestant and Catholic communities that flatly

⁴⁵ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 79/866/68, Gemeinderat (Bendeleben) to the LKR, 17/8/46.

⁴⁶ Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik. Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*, 2nd Edtn, (Berlin: Dietz, 1982).

contradicted church calls to guilt and repentance.⁴⁷ For example, a local pastor attempted to overturn a death sentence imposed on a former concentration camp guard.⁴⁸

Elsewhere, a local farmer who had been a member of the Nazi party from 1937 received the support of the local church council which played down his membership and remarked that he had been involved in instigating a woman's release from Gestapo custody. The man continued to sit on the local church council.⁴⁹ There were many other cases of church intercession for individual members of the TeK – even those with former Nazi party membership.⁵⁰ In attempting to call people to repentance, the pastorate of the TeK did itself no favours. As shown in chapter one, Catholic priests also interceded for parishioners suspected of former Nazi allegiances.

People also distanced themselves as far as possible from Nazism and denied their own responsibility. National Socialist government was identified with a power clique and the conflict was constantly referred to as 'Hitler's war'.⁵¹ According to a report of the committee of the Thuringian Action against Need:

Great is the sorrow and the misery that Hitler's criminal war has brought upon the German people...not only [must we] alleviate the need, we must give everything to the hundred thousand people, who [because of] Hitler have lost their homeland, everything.⁵²

⁴⁷ H. Glaser, 1945, *Beginn einer Zukunft...*, p. 328.

⁴⁸ *LKAE*, A 930 II, 60, Gäfentonna to the LKR, 7/1/48; *LKAE*, A 930 II, 62, Dr. R. Martin to Gräfentonna, 23/12/47.

⁴⁹ *LKAE*, A 750 II, 115, Kirchenrat (Daitzdorf) to the LKR, 26/4/46; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Frau Michaelis and Frau Müller to Mitzenheim, 17/6/48; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 256, Armin Böttinger to Mitzenheim, 17/7/48.

⁵⁰ *LKAE*, A 239 III, 172, the LKR to the SMATh, 22/12/45; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 61, Pf. Tschucke for Emil Stark; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 75, Langenerla to the CIC des Internement, 4/6/46; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 77, Mitzenheim for Hanna Schleicher, 27/1/48.

⁵¹ *Kriegsende...*, Ershausen, pp. 161-163; *LKAE*, A 750 IV, 138, Pf. Linz (Gotha) to the LKR, 11/3/1946; *GuH*, 1/11, 7/7/46, 'Helfende Hände steuern der Not, Vom Hilfswerk der Thüringer Kirche in Eisenach', Massow, p. 3; R. Wenzel (ed.), pp. 11-13; E. Fritze, *Die letzten Kriegstage im Eichsfeld...*, p. 113; H. Siebert, p. 25; cf. for a socialist view: R. Barthel, M. Fischer, pp. 5-7.

⁵² *LKAE*, A 750 III, 23, Landesausschluß der Thür.-Aktion gegen Not (Frau Paul-Vorst) to the Thuringian pastorate, undated.

Even former members of the Nazi party blamed the war and its outcome on Hitler and his ‘criminal regime’. Many people were repelled at the very memory of Nazism.⁵³

This attitude of victimisation is revealed in community responses to the Land Reform from August 1945.⁵⁴ Most of the people who had their land confiscated felt themselves innocent. In one instance, seventy families were evicted from their homes in the Schmalkalden district to new housing fifty kilometres away.⁵⁵ The people claimed, with Mitzenheim’s support, that they had given good service to the Church, had had nothing to do with Nazism and had ‘proven their anti-fascist convictions in word and deed’.⁵⁶ Another seeking the return of his property had joined the Nazi party in 1933, but only due to ‘necessity’. He had been actively involved in the Church and maintained his complete innocence: ‘No man will be able to say that I was at any time active [in the Nazi party] or had committed crimes and atrocities.’⁵⁷ It was incomprehensible to many people, even office holders in the Nazi party, that they somehow had a responsibility for National Socialism.

Individual requests to the churches for the release of loved ones from captivity also reflected the fact that people attempted to distance themselves as far as possible from Nazism. There were numerous attempts to whitewash the internees who often had murky pasts. For instance, a husband sought the aid of the church authorities for his wife who ‘to the best of my knowledge and conscience... must endure [internment] completely without guilt’. His wife had been a member of the Nazi party and the local Nazi women’s

⁵³ *LKAE*, A 239 Loses, G. Walther to Mitzenheim, 5/9/46; C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, pp. 79, 113-114, 230.

⁵⁴ H. Siebert, p. 136ff; H. A. Welsh, ‘Thüringen’, pp. 181-182; B. Andrees, p. 112; P. Ther, pp. 173-177; Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß. Ein Lebenslauf*, (Munich: 1991), pp. 105-106; M. Overesch, *Deutschland 1945-1949...*, pp. 101-104; W. Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, pp. 23-25; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 135-145; P. Bucher (ed.), pp. 60-70; R. Barthel, M. Fischer, p. 61.

⁵⁵ *ThHStAW*, Land Thüringen – BdM, 80/867/103, Mitzenheim to the Thuringian Minister President, 26/1/48; earlier: *LKAE*, A 750 II, 86, Mitzenheim to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/11/45.

⁵⁶ *LKAE*, A 750 II, 86, Mitzenheim to the Thuringian Minister President, 5/11/45.

⁵⁷ *LKAE*, A 750 II, 49, Dr. Walter Schulze to the LKR, 5/1/46; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 II, 131-133, Pf. Trinks to the Thuringian Minister President, 1/8/46; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Herr Grünberg (Themar) to Mitzenheim, 3/6/48; *LKAE*, A 750 II, 88, Mitzenheim to Pf. Topf, 20/12/45.

association leader (Ortsfrauenschaftsleiterin) since 1933.⁵⁸ A woman requested the help of the Church for her husband who had been a member of the Nazi party since 1933. She also believed him innocent of wrongdoing.⁵⁹ Another woman stated that while her husband had been a local Nazi party functionary, he had relinquished his duties in 1943.⁶⁰ Innocence was claimed on behalf of other men who were taken into custody on account of their wartime service in police divisions. The men after all had been forced to obey orders, otherwise ‘what would have happened to them?’⁶¹ Lastly, a father sought Mitzenheim’s help in the case of his daughter who had been a stenotypist for the Security Office (Sicherheitsdienst) during the war. Only through a ‘malicious’ denunciation, according to the father, could an arrest have been possible.⁶²

The most salient characteristic in all requests for the help of the Church is people’s lack of guilt. If the individuals in question had indeed belonged to the Nazi party or one of its satellite organisations, which was often the case, membership had been either forced upon them, was assumed for altruistic purposes or was not exploited.⁶³ In addition, that people, including former Nazi party members, were involved in the churches during the war disqualified them from guilt. Because one was a Christian and faithfully observed one’s church duties during the Nazi period, one could not possibly have been responsible for the transgressions of the government.

⁵⁸ *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Carl Heintze (Gößnitz) to Mitzenheim, 14/1/48; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Frau Wöhner to Mitzenheim, 26/1/48; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, the Thuringian Minister President to the LKR, 12/3/48; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 173, Kirchenrat Bonsack (Tabarz) to Mitzenheim, 16/3/48.

⁵⁹ *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 88, Erna Metz to Mitzenheim, 7/8/47; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 II, Frau Rosenstock to the LKR, 22/9/45; *LKAE*, A 750 II, 54, Frau Hellweg to Kirchenrat (unknown, perhaps Ernst Köhler), 22/10/46; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 265, Helene Müller (Pössneck) to Mitzenheim, 21/9/48; *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 109, Elli Schumacher to Mitzenheim, 10/11/47.

⁶⁰ *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 136, Mathilde Wipprecht to Mitzenheim, 3/1/48; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 173, Kirchenrat Bonsack (Tabarz) to Mitzenheim, 16/3/48.

⁶¹ *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 154, five wives (Gera) to Mitzenheim, 10/1/48; see also: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, Frau Kutzleben to Mitzenheim, 2/2/48.

⁶² *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, 252, Karl Henkel to Mitzenheim, 9/7/48.

⁶³ See, for example: *LKAE*, A 750 Beiakte zu IV, the Thuringian Minister President to the LKR, 12/3/48.

Thirdly, the difficult struggle for existence in post-war Germany and Thuringia obscured the crimes of National Socialism against others. Germans could not imagine that Nazism was responsible for the myriad sufferings of other peoples and, therefore, they were unable to feel any guilt. After all, in the myopic post-war period, surely nobody could have suffered more from Nazism than they themselves.⁶⁴ This was an attitude that was common throughout Germany, not just in Thuringia or the Soviet zone.⁶⁵ In Munich, for instance, there was little talk of the victims of Nazism as the focus was everyday concerns and pastoral duties.⁶⁶ In fact, people chose to blame others for their own plight rather than seeing themselves as culpable. One author in *Glaube und Heimat* observed the prevalence of grumbling about the lack of food, about one's neighbour and about God and 'all that He has allowed to happen to us', while, on the other hand, 'one almost never hears... a gripe about oneself and one's own sin'.⁶⁷ People's own dire plight constructed their innocence.

A final possible reason why people and communities denied responsibility for Nazism is Lutz Niethammer's contention that in maintaining one's own innocence and attempting to persuade others to believe it, one engaged successfully in self-deception.⁶⁸ Niethammer's study of denazification in Bavaria noted that the issue of guilt for people was psychological which one discarded in self-defence. It does seem possible to apply this thesis to Thuringia. Confronted by the post-war situation in which all vestiges of Nazism were anathema, people disavowed responsibility for themselves and theirs. In doing so, and blaming others instead, people established their innocence. This is especially apparent in regard to the letter writers who requested the intercession of the church authorities. If the authors viewed those imprisoned, who had been almost

⁶⁴ See: *GuH*, 1/5, 26/5/46, 'Vergebung – Einigkeit – Bruderschaft', p. 1; *GuH*, 2/37, 14/9/47, 'Ewigkeit in die Zeit – Sorgen?', Stegmann (Pösneck), p. 1; *GuH*, 3/10, 7/3/48, 'Hier spricht die Gemeinde', p. 4; *GuH*, 3/45, 7/11/48, 'Flucht in des Nichts', F. Högner, p. 1; C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch...*, p. 11; W. Knauff, *Katholische Kirche in der DDR...*, p. 26.

⁶⁵ L. Kettenacker, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Carsten Nicolaisen, Clemens Vollnhals, 'Evangelische Kirche und öffentliches Leben in München 1945-1949', in: *Trümmerzeit in München*, ed. F. Prinz, (Munich: 1984), p. 725.

⁶⁷ *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, 'Der Bußweg den sündigen Menschen', Sup. Herden (Gotha), p. 1.

⁶⁸ See above, n. 46.

invariably in closer proximity to Nazism, as innocent, then there is very little possibility that they themselves felt any personal guilt. In the act of writing, these people disabused themselves of any feelings of responsibility for the Nazi past.

Conclusion

Although the TeK was known as the home of the most radical German Christian sect in Germany, and, as such, the Church with the closest relationship to Nazism, the post-war bishop, Moritz Mitzenheim, never offered a full confession of guilt. This was due to three reasons. Firstly, in acknowledging the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt offered on behalf of the regional evangelical churches in Germany, Mitzenheim did not impeach the TeK with any particular responsibility and asserted instead that the blame was due to individual failings rather than the entire TeK. The Church also chose to remember martyrs and other resisters during the Nazi period, although resistance was the honour of only a very select minority. Thirdly, and most importantly, Mitzenheim was wary of offering a confession of guilt that would have reflected poorly on his policy of 'mild' denazification. Mitzenheim feared the intervention of state authorities and he sought to preserve the independence of the Church at all costs.

However, other elite members within the Church acknowledged a collective guilt that implicated the entire population. People were repeatedly urged to recognise their guilt and repent of it by articles in the weekly newspaper of the TeK, *Glaube und Heimat*. Despite this, guilt was not widely felt in Thuringian faith communities. Ultimately, the ideas of the TeK were not the same as those of the laity and, despite the lack of a general church confession, the Church was far more self-critical than the population at large. People did not accept any guilt as repeated clerical intercessions for former Nazis in the community undermined guilt. Only the most visible Nazis were blamed and the population imagined itself as an innocent pawn and a victim of Nazism. Most communities also had their own issues to deal with and these promoted a feeling that no one could have suffered more from the effects of Nazism than they. These concerns

involved worries for daily needs and often missing relatives. Psychologically also, people convinced themselves of their innocence.

As shown in chapters four and five, the religious revival in 1945 was both short-lived and superficial. People were interested only in what the churches could provide for them. When the churches required something from the wider population, however, in many places, most were unwilling to heed their blandishments. The TeK sought to prompt its parishioners to feel guilt but these attempts were futile as people were concerned first and foremost with their existential well-being. Very few, it seems, wanted their conscience probed. Because the Church failed in attempting to manipulate the attitudes of the community at large to accept some responsibility for Nazism, the TeK's moral influence on society was severely limited.

Conclusion: the position and influence of the churches

Both the American and Soviet occupations of Thuringia were feared but, despite some indiscretions, largely resulted in the resumption of 'normal' life for local populations. Despite difficult conditions, the free expression of religion offered by the Americans and Russians gave rise to significant interest in the churches by a large section of the Thuringian population in 1945. A final evaluation of the position and influence of the churches proceeds in two directions: the position of the churches in regard to the secular authorities, and the influence of the churches on society.

In post-war Thuringia, as throughout the SBZ, there were three major authorities: the Russian occupiers, the KPD/SED and the churches. It was, of course, the Russians who held supreme power in government. In purely ideological terms, the Soviets and the KPD/SED stood opposed to the churches. Despite this conflict, the churches were allowed to continue as independent mass institutions. It was, above all, Stalin's *Deutschlandpolitik* that guaranteed church autonomy. According to Elke Scherstjanoi, the Soviets delayed in making any long-term decision on the fate of East Germany and sought to create a 'balance of interests'.¹ In this, the key consideration was acquiring a stake in the industrially advanced Rhein and Ruhr regions. The Soviets continued to keep their options open from 1945 to 1948. It was events in 1949 primarily that caused the GDR to be born in October. The churches were the beneficiaries of this policy, and the continued, almost unmitigated independence of the churches until at least the end of 1948 supports, most appropriately, Scherstjanoi's conception of Russian aims in Germany. Given the Soviets' executive power, even despite the churches' popularity in 1945, it follows the Russian authorities could have crushed the churches if it had been Stalin's intention to do so.

¹ See chapter 2, esp. p. 74, above.

As for the German socialists, Russian support for the churches meant that *in theory* the KPD/SED tactically tolerated the churches and indeed recruited the churches in combating fascism, which was the common enemy of both. It seemed that the enemy of the enemy of socialism was its friend. *In practice*, however, the contradiction in the TeK, especially, was that National Socialist elements remained with the full knowledge of the church authorities despite denazification measures. The reality was that Christianity and socialism made uneasy bedfellows and there was conflict in Thuringia, particularly regarding religious instruction and denazification.

The outcome of this rivalry reveals the extent to which the Soviets were willing to offer the churches freedom and lend them corresponding authority in the cause of their *Deutschlandpolitik*. Despite the ideological similarities between the Russian occupiers and German communists, and their close cooperation in public life such as the administration and denazification, the Soviets largely chose to side with the churches against German socialist functionaries when quarrels arose.² Kolesnitschenko did ban confessional schools in ratifying the decree of the LfV to close confessional schools, but he balanced this with allowing the churches to dispense religious education at their leisure outside of school time. In terms of denazification, while the SED sought to intervene in the TeK's 'self-purification', the churches successfully resisted these encroachments despite a 'mild' process of denazification. Antagonistic and contrary measures perpetrated by 'rogue' Russian elements were also abjured and sometimes repudiated.³ The SMATh and, in particular, Major-General Ivan Kolesnitschenko, the head of civil affairs, had the final say in matters concerning the churches and he refunded fines and overturned decisions imposed upon the churches by Russian underlings.

In their interaction with the secular authorities, what was most important to the churches was continued independence. All along Mitzenheim sought to preserve the 'living space'

² On Soviet intervention see: M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 15, 19; on Soviet cooperation with German socialists see: M. Dennis, pp. 15-16; M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, p. 13-15; G. Pritchard, p. 58.

³ The existence of competing and often conflicting interests in the SMAD throughout the Soviet zone has been demonstrated by Norman Naimark and Stefan Creuzberger: N. Naimark, pp. 24-32; S. Creuzberger, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsmacht...*, pp. 40-43.

of the Church even if it meant compromising a thorough denazification process and a general confession of guilt. This *Thüringer Weg* tolerated and even tacitly encouraged socialism. Even members of the pastorate were members of the SED. Alfred Wolf from Schmölln, for example, was a former German Christian and after the end of the war entered the SED.⁴ Although Mitzenheim was determined not to see the recurrence of a totalitarian state, he did allow party-political influences into the Church which were authoritarian.⁵ One parishioner complained to Mitzenheim before the political elections in September 1946:

One cannot simultaneously serve two masters... Either one recognizes the bible and God's ten commandments as the foundation of all Christian life, or one serves the people the garbage of consistent Marxism, socialism and other drivel.⁶

The author's greatest complaint was that the TeK avoided taking a definitive line on the place of socialism within the Church. Mitzenheim had sought to accommodate socialism and he was awarded the GDR's most prestigious civil award, the 'Golden Order of Merit' (Verdienstorden in Gold), by the head of state, Walter Ulbricht, three days after the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961.⁷ On the other hand, the Catholic Church in Thuringia, as throughout Germany, chose to remain largely aloof from politics. It too attempted to create a space that was protected from the encroachments of the state, and in doing so was, in general, prepared to humour socialism as long as it did not dictate to the Church. The Catholic Church moulded its own 'subculture' that was primarily introverted.⁸ Both churches acted in their own self-interest and were concerned above all in maintaining their autonomy. The churches were not interested at all in combating

⁴ See, on the career of Wolf: T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, pp. 223-241.

⁵ Cf. G. Heidtmann (ed.), pp. 28-29, 41-45; Moritz Mitzenheim, *Politische Diakonie, Reden, Erklärungen, Aufsätze 1946-1964*, (Berlin: 1964), pp. 12-15; T. A. Seidel, *Im Übergang der Diktaturen...*, p. 116; H. Findeis, D. Pollack (eds.), pp. 52-53.

⁶ LKAE, A 239 Loses, G. Walther to Mitzenheim, 5/9/46; cf. LKAE, A 239 Loses, anonymous to the LKR, 15/10/46.

⁷ G. Besier, 'Aus der Resistenz in der Kooperation', p. 197; R. Mau, *Eingebunden in den Realsozialismus?...*, p. 147-149.

⁸ See W. Tischner, pp. 562-568.

socialism but rather sought to co-exist alongside it. In all, the churches enjoyed significant freedom of movement from the other two major authorities in the SBZ, the Russian occupiers and the KPD/SED. The post-war position of the churches was one of privilege and allowed them an unprecedented opportunity to solidify and to expand their influence over the population at large.

The fall of the Nazi State and the ensuing swift denazification measures against fascist elements in many areas of the Soviet zone left an ideological vacuum. In this void, the independence of the churches presented them with a free hand toward the population. It seemed that the churches took the most of this opportunity: the religious revival experienced in 1945 boded well and charity efforts were extraordinary in the post-war period. More than nine in ten people in the SBZ pledged membership to the churches in October 1946. In reality, however, the population at large did not adhere to church directives regarding attendance at weekly services, social behaviour and elite ideas about guilt. The influence of the churches over the population was only theoretical and religious apathy was the order of the day. The SED too failed in winning over the people to its ideology, yet the party's political power more than made up for its unpopularity.

The churches did make vigorous efforts to help the population in the deprivation of the post-war period.⁹ The task of the churches was clear: 'The Church must now provide proof that love is stronger than all suffering, that the eternal light streams brighter than all the darkness of the world...'.¹⁰ In this aim, however, the churches were not entirely successful. The Catholic Church particularly bore a great burden in the care of the refugees, eventually around twelve million, who flooded into Germany during the post-war period. Most were Catholic. Their material and spiritual aid was the primary concern of the Church in Thuringia in the period 1945 to 1948. However, chapels suitable for church services and clergy were in short supply and many stop-gap measures were implemented in order to rectify the situation. These measures were not always sufficient

⁹ See: *GuH*, 3/21-22, 30/5/48, 'Vom Segen dieser Zeit', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Gera), p. 2.

¹⁰ *GuH*, 2/13, 30/3/47, 'Das Mitleid ausgewandert?', p. 4.

and the failure of both churches to provide adequate spiritual and material care for believers meant that many people were abandoned when their need was greatest.

The inability of the churches to overcome the desperate need in Thuringia until at least the end of 1948 eroded the strong position of the churches in 1945. The bond between church and society disintegrated and the churches were unable to exert a lasting influence over the population. The fairly clear picture of a religious revival in 1945 was murky by 1948. While significant numbers still attended services, many did not and the churches were unable to compel people to attend. The revival in 1945 was not only short-lived, it was also superficial. Calls to involvement in church life and social action often went unheeded and the institutional churches simply lost touch with the community.¹¹ The churches' ultimate failure to manipulate social behaviour is best represented in a case study of the interaction between the refugees and native Thuringians. Both the Catholic and Protestant churches attempted to prevail upon the locals to welcome the newcomers.¹² This simply did not occur on a broad scale.

Church and society were further separated by different conceptions of guilt. While the TeK did not offer a specific collective confession of guilt on behalf of the Church, there were elite ideas of guilt which failed to influence the attitudes of the population. Local communities viewed the Nazi government as exterior to them and the sole responsibility of a small power clique. They believed that none could have suffered more from Nazism than they themselves. The attempt at 're-Christianisation', hailed by church authorities in 1945, was a complete and utter failure. In no way did the churches win over the hearts and minds of most post-war Thuringians.

¹¹ *GuH*, 2/52, 28/12/47, 'Unsere Jahresaufgabe: Mitarbeiter!', Oberkirchenrat Köhler, p. 4; *GuH*, 2/5, 2/2/47, 'Wirkt mit am Aufbau der neuen ev. Kirchenordnung Thüringens', D.W. Macholz, p. 1; *GuH*, 3/5, 1/2/48, 'Hier spricht die Gemeinde: Mitarbeit', p. 3; *GuH*, 3/17-18, 2/5/48, 'Hier Spricht die Gemeinde – Antwort auf die Frage: "Was nun?"', p. 2; *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, 'Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?', p. 2; *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, 'Warum schweigen die Gemeindeglieder?', Dr. Dawczewski, p. 2; *GuH*, 3/34, 22/8/48, 'Evangelische Männergemeinde fordert!', H. Wunder, p. 3.

¹² *GuH*, 2/8, 23/2/47, 'Nochmals ein offenes Wort an unsere Thüringer Landsleute', p.1; see also: *GuH*, 2/29, 20/7/47, 'Zur ersten Bibelwoche', Pf. Waldmann, p. 2.

In the absence of a widespread church influence over society, the population at large did not run to the churches' ideological opponent, socialism, either. The popular estimation of the Russians was largely negative as, for instance, rapes and harassment throughout the duration of the occupation period created unrest and left a sour taste in the mouths of Thuringians.¹³ The close relationship of the Russians to the KPD/SED linked the German communists with the worst aspects of the Soviet occupation. The population even had the tendency to view the KPD/SED as its *Unheilsherrscher* and, as such, blamed the socialists for their plight.¹⁴ The Thuringian SED, moreover, inherited the considerable ill-will that had been directed at the KPD during its messy 'seizure of power' from the SPD in late 1945 and early 1946.¹⁵ Corey Ross and Arnd Bauerkämper have also shown that there was a pervading atmosphere of 'rejection and hostility' toward the SED in the German countryside, particularly regarding the Land Reform from late 1945.¹⁶ Given the established position of the churches and the party's own unpopularity, the SED certainly did not succeed in Thuringia, as throughout East Germany, in developing a successful socialist *Religionspolitik* in the first years after the war. Much of the population, including the Christian constituency, rejected the SED out of hand.¹⁷

The result was that both the churches and the KPD/SED ultimately failed in the period 1945 to 1948 to fill the ideological vacuum left by the demise of fascism. Both struggled to persuade the population to adopt their worldview. People at large chose neither, were not interested in adhering to either ideology and instead fell into religious apathy. The churches were unable to counteract this *Zeitgeist* largely because their connection with the population at large had been compromised by their inability to overcome the post-war deprivation that obscured hope even within church communities.¹⁸ The void created by

¹³ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 46-48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-52; see also: C. Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots...*, p. 27.

¹⁵ M. Overesch, *Machtergreifung von Links...*, p. 129ff.

¹⁶ C. Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots...*, p. 25-30; A. Bauerkämper, pp. 247-252.

¹⁷ G. Besier, 'Kommunistische Religionspolitik und kirchlicher Neuanfang', p. 145.

¹⁸ *GuH*, 1/4, 19/5/46, 'Andacht: Dennoch!', P. (Altenburg), p. 1; *GuH*, 1/5, 26/5/46, 'Andacht: Himmelfahrt', Pompetzki (Jena), p. 1; *GuH*, 1/17, 18/8/46, 'Sollt ich meinem Gott nicht singen?', G. Schröer, p. 1.

religious indifference was filled by materialism and the pursuit of pleasure.¹⁹ According to one churchman:

Perhaps the most fitting analysis of the *mentalité* of many Christians is expressed in this way: 'That is our sickness: spiritual schizophrenia – the double life: Life (A) : time spent in church ceremonies; Life (B) : Everyday life. Religion of money; completely apart from Jesus Christ.'²⁰

In general, many articles in *Glaube und Heimat* over the period 1946-1948 rued the prevalence of apathy to the Church and 'un-Christian' attitudes and behaviour.²¹ A reading of *Glaube und Heimat* reveals a church 'siege mentality' against materialism and also religious indifference. The churches were in 'weak defence although we all know that true faith is on attack'.²² One author observed the marked lack of hope and life amongst confessing Christians and accused them of being 'lethargic' and 'lukewarm'. He further maintained that most believers were poor witnesses and challenged them: 'When will you Christians finally recognise that [a duty to others] lies upon you?'²³

There was an ideological apathy that accompanied the political passivity observed by Gareth Pritchard and Mark Allinson in the post-war period.²⁴ An 'active minority' maintained church life and independence from the secular authorities, but was unable to influence the passive majority to change the way they behaved and thought. In fact, widespread religious indifference in the post-war period was a legacy of the Nazi past and created the conditions for, and framed, the political

¹⁹ *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, 'Weg aus dem Chaos', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Griez), p. 4; see also: *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, 'Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?', p. 2; *GuH*, 2/28, 13/7/47, 'Wann endlich?', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt, p. 2.

²⁰ *GuH*, 3/50, 12/12/48, 'Für den jungen Menschen – "Was ich am Jugendtag hörte und mir merkte"', p. 2.

²¹ See, for example: *GuH*, 1/1, 21/4/46, 'Andacht: Auferstehung', Rgr., p. 1; *GuH*, 1/18, 25/8/46, 'Der Auszug des modernen Menschen aus dem Vaterhaus', Sup. Bauer (Stadtroda), p.1; *GuH*, 2/15, 13/4/47, 'Hier spricht die Gemeinde – Bleibe deiner Kirche treu!', H. Lorenz (Tabarz), p. 4; *GuH*, 2/18, 4/5/47, 'Die Stunde der Barmherzigkeit', Dr. Hans Lilge, p.4; *GuH*, 2/38, 21/9/47, 'Worauf kommt es an?', p. 1; *GuH*, 2/41, 12/10/47, 'Weg aus dem Chaos', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt (Griez), p. 4; *GuH*, 3/1, 4/1/48, 'Der Bußweg den sündigen Menschen', Sup. Herden (Gotha), p. 1; *GuH*, 3/12, 21/3/48, 'Unsere Aussprache über Mitarbeit', F. Zimmer (Bad Blankenburg), p. 3.

²² *GuH*, 3/46, 14/11/48, 'Was beunruhigt mich am meisten?', p. 2.

²³ *GuH*, 2/28, 13/7/47, 'Wann endlich?', Dr. H.-J. Schmidt, p. 2

²⁴ G. Pritchard, pp. 15-26; M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 49-52.

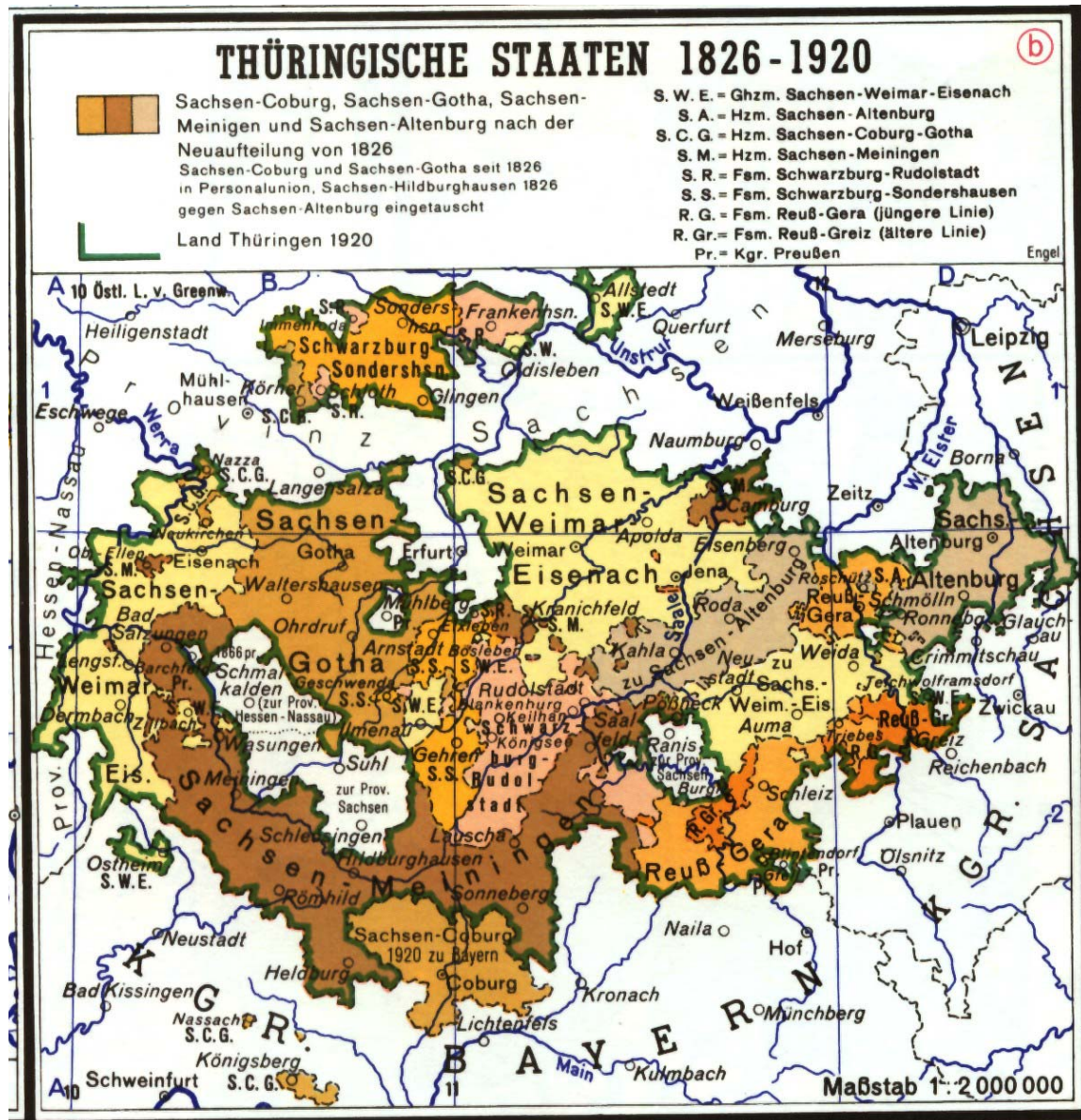
passivity in the early GDR.²⁵ Politics in the later SBZ and the GDR were, after all, founded on ideology – whether one was for or against socialism.

The period 1945 to 1948 was a lost golden opportunity for the churches. The churches found themselves, in 1945, with an unprecedented position gifted to them by the Soviet authorities. The post-war religious revival represented a foundation upon which the churches could begin life anew and enduringly ‘re-Christianise’ the population. However, while the churches enjoyed continued autonomy from the secular authorities and the membership of over ninety percent of the population, their social influence in reality over the population was severely limited. As one perceptive youth pointed out: ‘The [Protestant] Church imagines itself to be much more important than is the case in reality.’²⁶ The churches simply could not summon the resources to win over the hearts and minds of the population to Christianity, nor were they prepared to oppose socialism in the zone, which was drawn increasingly closer to a communist dictatorship under the influence of the SED. Even the unpopularity of the SED amongst great swaths of the people did not matter so much: Russian support and the SED’s own political supremacy overwhelmed the power of ideas in the pervasive environment of apathy. Without the influence to manipulate a largely ‘Christian’ society, the churches were ultimately unable to translate high statistical membership into attitudinal and social behaviours that they desired.

²⁵ M. Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion...*, pp. 162-167.

²⁶ *GuH*, 3/8, 22/2/48, ‘Wie die Jugend über die Kirche denkt’, p. 4.

Maps



Map I: Thuringian states 1826-1920. The Thuringian principalities that comprised *Land Thüringen* in 1920 are encompassed by the thick green line. Note that Sachsen-Coburg was not a part of *Land Thüringen* but joined Bavaria in 1920.
(Source: <http://www.verfassungen.de/de/preussen/thueringen>)

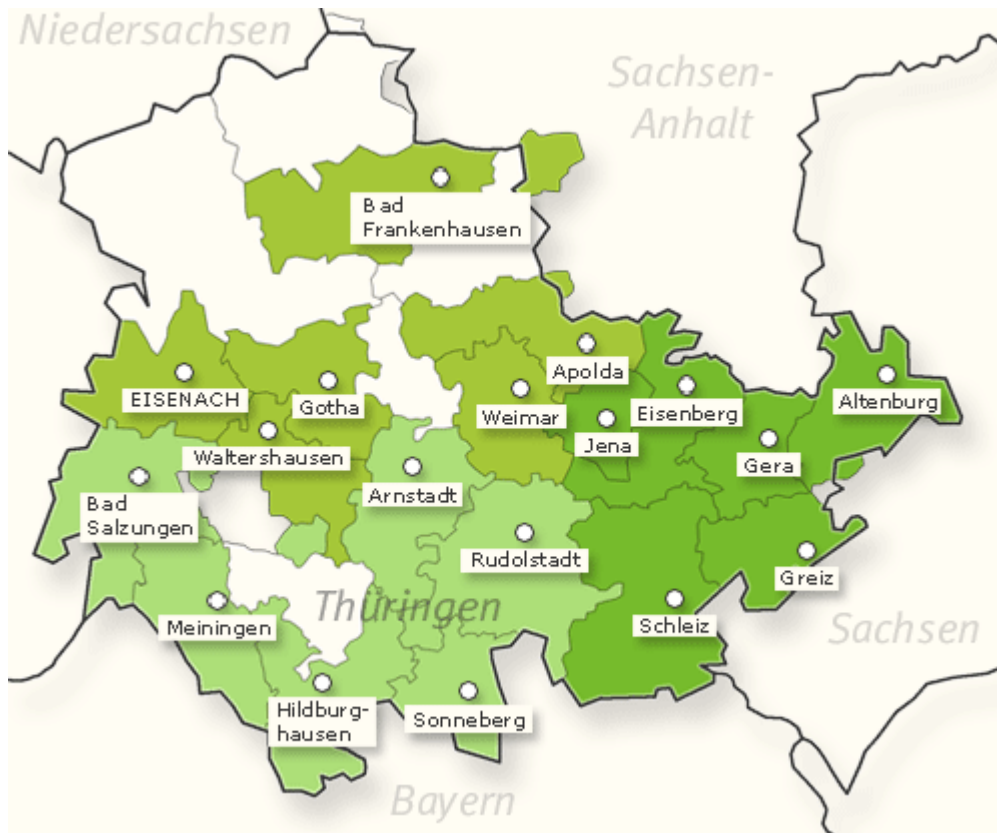


Map II: *Land Thüringen* from 1945.
(Source: http://www.tks-tkg.de/map_thuringia.gif)



Map III: The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) after 1945.

(Source: *Völker, Staaten und Kulturen - ein Kartenwerk zur Geschichte*, [Georg Westermann Verlag: Braunschweig, 1980])



Map IV: The *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Thüringen* (2007). The coloured areas correspond to the *Aufsichtsbezirk West* (Kreiskirchenamt Gotha), the *Aufsichtsbezirk Ost* (Kreiskirchenamt Gera) and the *Aufsichtsbezirk Süd* (Kreiskirchenamt Meiningen), which did not exist in the post-war period. The overall area however remains the same as that of the *Thüringer evangelische Kirche* (1945-1948).

(Source: <http://www.ekmd-online.de/portal/unserekirchen/2-kirchenkreisesuperintendenturen/02-superintendenturenELKTH/?open=173>)



Map V: The Catholic Church in Germany after 1945.

(Source: *Völker, Staaten und Kulturen - ein Kartenwerk zur Geschichte*, [Georg Westermann Verlag: Braunschweig, 1980])

Please see the attached pdf file or hard-bound copy of the thesis held in the central library for this map.

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